

Dissent and Critical Thought  
in the German Democratic Republic

by

Bruce Allen

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Department of Politics  
Brock University  
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# DISSENT AND CRITICAL THOUGHT IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

## INTRODUCTION

Dissent and critical thought are recurrent and increasingly significant phenomena within East bloc societies. Their growing importance can be attributed to numerous factors. One is their presence within the East bloc at a time when there is an unprecedented process of reform underway in the USSR, the effects of which are being felt throughout Eastern Europe. Another factor is the uneasy co-existence of this dissent with governments which are experiencing an uncertain process of leadership change as leaders who have been in power for decades in their respective countries either leave or prepare to leave their posts. Still another is the presence of these manifestations of dissent and critical thought on an unsurpassed scale at the very same time as the prospects for a new era of East-West detente have improved substantially. Accordingly, the cumulative effect of developments such as these has been to accentuate the need to thoroughly comprehend the ideas and activities of those individuals, groups and movements which are striving for social and political change in these East bloc societies.

With this in mind one can turn to the particular case of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) or East Germany. For a long time the DDR was a sorely neglected topic of academic research. This was especially true in the West

where it was not diplomatically recognized until the early 1970's. Prior to that the DDR was considered something less than a legitimate political entity. Western academics paid even less attention to examples of dissent and critical thought in the DDR. In the public mind they were non-existent.

The June 1953 workers' insurrection illustrated this situation well. It quickly became a forgotten event - except in West Germany. The scant attention paid to later manifestations of dissent focused only on the most prominent intellectual critics in the DDR. In fact, it was not until the expulsions of Wolf Biermann and Rudolph Bahro in the last half of the 1970's and the subsequent emergence of a small but very significant autonomous peace movement in the 1980's that some Western observers began to take serious notice of the ongoing existence of East German dissent.

It is in view of this situation that a serious and broad analysis of the phenomena of East German dissent and critical thought is overdue in North America. It is in the context of the most recent manifestations of these phenomena and their relationship to the broader political developments noted above that the need for such an analysis has taken on an unprecedented degree of importance and even urgency. This is especially true since there now exists in the DDR a discernible and enduring oppositional force which constitutes an integral part of an ongoing East Bloc-wide and increasingly integrated and mutually supporting

phenomenon of oppositional activity. In addition, this activism can, to a growing extent, now be considered something of a complement to the reform process emanating from Moscow. It also has the potential to supersede the latter.

The project attempted here consists of addressing this need for an analysis by formulating an in-depth, chronological study of the phenomena of dissent and critical thought in the German Democratic Republic which is designed, ultimately, to demonstrate their significance for the DDR and, by implication, for the East bloc and Europe as a whole. This task will be pursued in the following manner.

Chapter One will provide an analysis of the origins, early development and consolidation of the German Democratic Republic as a state administering a social system closely approximating the one forged by Lenin and Stalin in the Soviet Union. As will be seen it was out of this socio-political context that the first major manifestations of dissent arose in 1951 and, much more importantly, in 1953. The description of these will be complemented by an examination of the pivotal role of the USSR in shaping these developments.

Chapter Two will similarly highlight the decisive role of the USSR in shaping both the development of the DDR and the manifestations of dissent and critical thought during the remainder of the 1950's. This will be accomplished by

discussing the impact in the DDR of the 1956 East bloc crisis and how the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)-led government of Walter Ulbricht managed to survive the pressures for political change which it engendered. Thus, considerable attention will be paid to the East German government's response to the limited process of de-Stalinization led by Soviet Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev. The effects of the dramatic events in Poland and Hungary during 1956 will likewise be a topic of major concern.

Chapter Three will, in part, examine the evolution of Church-State relations in the DDR. This examination will trace their difficult development from the early years of the DDR up until the agreements reached between them in 1978 establishing the East German Protestant Church as a unique, independent institution within East German society capable of sheltering independent political activity. This chapter will also consider the significance of the construction of the Berlin Wall with respect to its effect on the stability of the DDR and on the form and content of East German dissent and critical thought.

Chapter Four will focus on the critical voices within the East German intellectual and cultural communities. These communities have been ongoing sources of dissent and critical thought much to the chagrin of the SED hierarchy. This was especially true during the 1960's and 1970's. Considerable attention will be devoted to the leading critics

within these communities. These include Robert Havemann, Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf, Reiner Kunze, Wolf Biermann and, especially, Rudolph Bahro. The latter formulated a major political critique of East German society and called for its revolutionary transformation. The role of these individuals will be analyzed with a particular view towards developments in the 1980's. The analysis of their ideas and activities will also facilitate an understanding of the significance of Eurocommunism for East German dissent and critical thought. This will likewise illustrate the importance of both the Prague Spring experiment and the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia for dissent in the DDR.

Chapter Five will follow on the treatment of the significance of the 1968 experiment in Czechoslovakia by examining the impact of Solidarnosc and the Polish Crisis on East German dissent and critical thought. This will entail a detailed look at the official East German response to social unrest in Poland, an assessment of the situation currently faced by workers in the DDR and a look at their reactions to the formation of an independent trade union movement in Poland. Consideration will also be given to examples of visible discontent by East German workers during the period of Solidarnosc's above ground activity.

Chapter Six shall provide a detailed analysis of the autonomous peace movement in the DDR. The analysis of it

will rightfully make Chapter Six the single most substantive chapter of this work. Three reasons in particular can be cited for giving extensive treatment to the autonomous peace movement. One is that this movement represents the most sustained expression of independent political activity in the history of the DDR. Another is its special characteristic of having spawned other currents of independent political activity. Notably it has led to the birth of feminist and human rights activism and has aided the development of ecological activism. The third reason is that without it there would probably not be an oppositional force active in the DDR today.

Chapter Seven will be devoted to the appearance of these ecological and explicitly human rights initiatives and to their roles in facilitating the rise of the consciously oppositional force now active in the DDR. In the process of addressing these movements the political impact of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in East Germany will be considered in some depth. Attention will also be devoted to the nature of the new East German opposition, the far-reaching political critiques of East German society which it has advanced and specific initiatives the new opposition has proposed which would begin a process of social and political change in the DDR.

The analysis will partially conclude with an overview of the topic which contemplates the reasons why manifestations of dissent and critical thought in the German



Democratic Republic have assumed the unique character they have. Following this, these examples of independent political activity will be compared to similar phenomena elsewhere in the Soviet sphere of Europe. Such a comparison will, in turn, help to make it possible to judge the relative influences of the Soviet Union and West Germany on the nature of oppositional activity in the DDR.

The above will facilitate an assessment of the present significance and future potential of the new East German opposition. This assessment will likewise offer some indication of what the political future holds for the German Democratic Republic as a separate German state closely allied with the Soviet Union.

## CHAPTER I

THE STALINIST REVOLUTION  
AND THE 1953 INSURRECTION

The process which culminated in the transformation of the Soviet Zone of occupied Germany into a formally independent state administering a social system based upon the Soviet model commenced with the arrival of the Red Army together with the emigre leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD). The emigre faction of the KPD leadership or the 'Ulbricht Group' quickly proceeded to restore functioning essential services. This was done with the assistance of the Soviet Military Administration. Thus, from the outset the KPD's emigre leadership, functioning under Soviet guidance, started to emerge as the leading social and political force in the Soviet occupied zone.

The subsequent legalization of all anti-fascist political parties and mass organizations such as trade unions, under the auspices of an 'Anti-Fascist Democratic Order' did not alter the fact that the KPD was acquiring this leading role. Nor did the KPD's professed support for political pluralism in the Soviet occupied zone. Ulbricht made this clear at the time. He said the new political set-up "must look democratic but we must have complete control."<sup>1</sup>

The Anti-Fascist Democratic Order later gave way to the formation of a 'National Front' and the founding of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) on October 7, 1949. In the

interim many crucial political, economic and social changes took place. Notable among these was the formation of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in April 1946.

Immediately following the war there existed strong sentiment favouring a merger of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) with the KPD thus uniting the two main parties of the German working class. Initially, the KPD was opposed to the idea wanting to delay unification until it was certain that its cadres could assume control of the key leadership positions in the future unity party.<sup>2</sup>

The SPD meanwhile insisted on a merger based on the free decision of the members of both parties across all of Germany. This would assure SPD dominance since even in the Soviet Zone support for the social democrats exceeded support for the Communists. Faced with this situation the KPD moved to merge the two party organizations within the Soviet Zone without the approval of either the national SPD leadership or its membership in the Soviet Zone. It succeeded in this by enlisting the support of a section of the SPD led by Otto Grotewohl who was subsequently awarded the top post in the new Socialist Unity Party. With the Soviet Military Administration's assistance the new SED proceeded towards the consolidation of an effective monopoly of political power.

Another major step towards the establishment of one party rule involved the formation of two new parties in 1948. The National Democratic Party of Germany and the

Democratic Peasants Party of Germany were formed specifically to undermine the positions of the Liberal Democratic and Christian Democratic Parties both of which constituted significant opponents of the SED. Accordingly, the two new parties were pro-Soviet and owed their existence to the SED since they were immediately integrated into the National Front which it dominated.

The integration of the mass organizations into the Soviet-controlled political process accentuated the trend towards one party rule. These mass organizations had been transformed into SED directed bodies accounting for over half the zone's population in their memberships. The SED politically strengthened itself by seeing that they acquired representation in the Volkskammer or People's Chamber since this helped it to achieve domination of the legislative process in the Soviet Zone.<sup>3</sup>

Elections went in a similar direction. Relatively free elections were followed by ones in which dissident SPD candidates were not allowed to run. By 1950 elections were characterized by a distinct lack of choice. Voters could only choose a single list of National Front candidates.

The SED also underwent major changes during this period. It was initially a mass party retaining a strong social democratic influence and stood for a specific German Road to Socialism. But this too was a temporary phenomenon. Events such as the intensification of the Cold War, the Berlin Blockade and the Soviet-Yugoslav split facilitated

the imposition of Stalinist orthodoxy within the Party. The SED consequently became more of a cadre organization modelled on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).<sup>4</sup>

Deviations from Soviet ideological orthodoxy became identified with Yugoslavia and 'Titoism.' Advocates of a German Road to Socialism such as ideologist Anton Ackermann were vilified. The principal losers in all this were the former members of the SPD. Their influence in the ruling party declined to the point where by 1950 there were almost no former social democrats remaining in the ruling Politbureau.

The one person who benefited most from this process was Walter Ulbricht. He became the General Secretary of the SED's Central Committee at the Third Party Congress in July 1950. Significantly, Ulbricht was the person in the SED leadership who the Soviets trusted most. An orthodox adherent of the Soviet political line, his consolidation of undisputed power in the Party was symptomatic of the progressive Sovietization of East German society. The political changes taking place were accordingly matched by a corresponding economic and social transformation.

The economy in the immediate postwar period was in ruins. The situation of the East German population was pitiful as a result of the combined effects of war devastation and massive Soviet-imposed reparations.<sup>5</sup> The Soviets dismantled over a thousand factories and took them away. The reparations sapped the economy, adversely

affecting investment in particular.

These problems were compounded by sharply reduced access to essential raw materials and half finished products normally obtained from West Germany. These goods could not be obtained in adequate quantities from other East bloc states. In addition the flow of East German refugees westward began resulting in losses of labour power.

The economic transformation of the Soviet Zone progressed under these conditions. One of the new regime's first moves involved the expropriation of property belonging to ex-Nazis. The expropriation of the landed estates belonging to the Junkers followed shortly thereafter. The result was a radically restructured agrarian population.

Subsequent moves aimed at the transformation of the East German economy were engineered by the German Economic Commission. The Soviets established it on June 27, 1947. The economy was then subjected to a calculated and costly disengagement from the West in the latter part of 1948. This development roughly corresponded to the introduction of a planned economy.<sup>6</sup>

Industry was accordingly concentrated in the state sector of the economy. Its development was conditioned according to Soviet priorities. As a result heavy industry was stressed to the detriment of consumer goods production. The SED specifically set out to expand the production of raw materials, iron, steel and energy.

Despite these moves and the later initiation of a

Soviet style Five Year Plan for 1951 to 1955 the DDR still had not fully installed a Soviet model economic system. In fact the DDR was the only East bloc state to retain anything like a viable private sector into the early 1950's.<sup>7</sup> But this was only a temporary deviation.

In July 1952 Ulbricht, at a SED conference, proclaimed that the DDR was "building Socialism."<sup>8</sup> In line with Stalinist dogma this necessitated "an intensification of the class struggle." With respect to the economy this meant an accelerated push to develop heavy industry and especially a drive to collectivize agriculture. The latter resulted in worsening food shortages as agricultural production dropped. Industrial production had already been adversely affected by sweeping nationalizations.

The Party's policies concerning education, youth, religion and culture reflected a complementary social transformation. Thus, in education a law was enacted in 1946 prohibiting educational institutions other than those of the State. With the foundation of the DDR came a wholesale importation of Soviet features into the educational system. Soon the Russian language was a compulsory subject. By 1951 the study of Marxism-Leninism was compulsory too.<sup>9</sup>

The Free German Youth (FDJ) quickly monopolized all youth work in the Soviet Zone. The FDJ was one of those mass organizations which facilitated the SED's realization of a monopoly of political power. Erich Honecker, the

future leader of the Party and a close ally of Ulbricht at the time, emerged as the head official of this youth organization.

By 1950 Free German Youth membership stood at over one million. From its inception the FDJ functioned as a mobilizing tool in support of the Party. This function was complemented by its role as a means to politically socialize East German youth. By the mid-1950's the FDJ also served as a source of recruits for the newly formed National People's Army (NVA).

Nonetheless, the FDJ had its problems. For example, a major internal purge was deemed necessary when it fell far short of its goal in obtaining volunteers for the paramilitary forces which existed before the formation of the NVA in early 1956.<sup>10</sup>

Stalinization proceeded similarly with respect to religion and culture. Religious freedom as well as official tolerance towards Christianity were progressively reduced. By 1952 religious instruction had been virtually eliminated in the schools and the churches became the object of systematic harassment. Culture meanwhile was subordinated to the political line on the arts put forward by Stalin's Commissar for Contemporary Culture, Zhdanov.

Opposition to such policies were dangerous. The possible consequences were indicative of how the transformation of East Germany had been backed up by an all-pervasive police apparatus which had been administered and



expanded by the SED and its predecessor, the KPD. Horst Bienek learned this in 1951. A protege of Brecht, he distributed a leaflet critical of official cultural policy. For doing this he was arrested, tried in secret and sentenced to 25 years hard labour.<sup>11</sup> The DDR was firmly in the grip of Stalinism.

Stalin's death did not result in any substantial changes at first. It did shock the DDR's rulers sufficiently to plunge them into a temporary state of confusion and disorientation. Conversely, it raised hopes for an easing of repression and liberalization. But Ulbricht frustrated these hopes by resisting pressures to de-Stalinize both from within the DDR as well as from Moscow. He did this despite the prevalence of severe shortages, rising numbers of East German citizens fleeing to the West and the existence of jails packed with political prisoners. His intransigence rested on hopes that the hard-line faction around Molotov would win the unfolding power struggle within the CPSU.<sup>12</sup> This did not happen.

Consequently, the decisive impetus for substantial measures to de-Stalinize the DDR came from the 'revisionists' in Moscow. Their pressure was instrumental in forcing the implementation of the 'New Course' announced on June 11, 1953. Expropriations of private property were abruptly halted. Recently collectivized farms were returned to their original owners. Plans for the development of heavy industry were sharply cut back. Persons jailed during

the 1952 collectivization were released en masse. Citizen's legal rights were enhanced. Policies concerning culture and religion were liberalized.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, Ulbricht viewed all these new policies as wrong.

Not everyone in the DDR directly benefited from the New Course. It contained nothing specifically for workers. In fact they saw themselves as the one section of the population which had been ignored.<sup>14</sup>

The lack of concessions to workers was particularly offensive since just two weeks earlier, on May 28th, the SED had imposed new, higher work norms on them. These norms effectively raised their workloads and cut their real incomes. Furthermore, the new norms were integral to the SED's strategy for economic recovery in the face of approaching bankruptcy. This indicated an official desire to make the working class bear a large part of the burden of resolving a growing crisis the workers were not responsible for. The move testified to the plight of the East German workers under SED rule.

In reality the DDR's workers were exploited and powerless. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was in fact a dictatorship over the proletariat. East German Socialism likewise bore some of the worst features of capitalism. Thus, the norm system was indicative of the widespread use of piece-rates in East German industry which along with systems of bonuses created enormous differences in income. In general, workers' incomes were low. In 1950,

real wages were less than half of what they had been in 1936.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the SED's focus on capital accumulation, collectivization of agriculture and its stress on heavy industry created shortages of goods.

The official trade union shared in the responsibility for the workers' situation. Labour organizations had been amalgamated into the Free German Labour Union (FDGB). Like the official youth body, the FDGB was one of the mass organizations directed towards the realization of the Party's goals. For example, during the Stalinist period, these official labour unions assisted SED agitprop campaigns in favour of higher work norms.<sup>16</sup>

Worker acceptance of these conditions was enforced by the Stalinist police apparatus as well as by bodies like the ones which made up the Free German Labour Union. Resistance was nearly impossible as a result but it did occur on a small scale. Specifically, in the summer of 1951 there were clashes between workers and the People's Police in several centers. These were sparked by increases in workloads not matched by financial gains. The main event involved a revolt by uranium miners in Saalfel.<sup>17</sup>

Resistance became more possible after Stalin's death due to the combined, accumulating pressures for reform coming from within East German civil society as well as from within the CPSU and then from within the SED itself. Consequently, more strikes occurred in the spring of 1953. These affected workplaces in Eisleben, Finsterwalde,

Furstenwalde, Chemnitz-Borna and other towns indicating a rising tide of working class dissent. The strikers issued demands which would be heard again in June.<sup>18</sup>

The pressure for reform within the SED was intertwined with a power struggle not so different from the one occurring within the Soviet Party. The SED leadership conflict was also dependent upon the latter's outcome. Within the DDR it had the important effect of creating a division which weakened the State's capacity for action.

The struggle involved a challenge to Ulbricht's leadership by fellow Politbureau members Wilhelm Zaisser, the Minister of State Security, and Rudolph Herrnstadt, the editor of the Party newspaper Neues Deutschland. Ulbricht's rivals had other Politbureau members on their side. They also had a sweeping program of reform along revisionist lines but this program never saw the light of day.

Their program met this fate for a number of reasons. Zaisser and Herrnstadt were handicapped by a lack of popular support. They also had no structural mechanisms at their disposal which could enable them to mobilize either the SED rank and file or the population against Ulbricht. Zaisser and Herrnstadt made a crucial tactical error as well. They aligned themselves with the ill-fated Beria in the CPSU power struggle in Moscow.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, the decisive factor in keeping Ulbricht in power as SED leader was the East German working class. It saved Ulbricht by taking advantage of the more relaxed

political atmosphere to vent its collective rage against him and the system he ruled.

The June 1953 insurrection started with a strike to protest the increased work norms. The job action involved a mere 80 to 100 construction workers employed on Stalinallee in East Berlin. They left their workplace and began a small demonstration which formed behind a crudely painted banner which read "Down with the 10 Percent Rise in the Norms." Metal workers joined in followed by scores of others. In little time East Berlin's workers had rallied to their cause and the march swelled to some 10,000 people by the time it reached the main government building in the capital.

As the protest grew its demands became more overtly political and hence more radical. The strikers and their supporters chanted, "We are not slaves." They demanded Ulbricht's removal from power, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the DDR and free elections. Aspirations for German re-unification were evident as well. Significantly, all these desires corresponded closely with the political program of the West German SPD revealing that the East German workers still identified with its traditions.

The split at the top of the SED led to panicky confusion within the hierarchy over how to respond to the protest. The situation was different at the rank and file level of the Party. Information documented after the revolt revealed widespread participation by SED members. Subsequent purges further indicated that a third of those

disciplined had been members of the old German Communist Party prior to Hitler's accession to power. This too indicated continuity within the working class. East German workers who identified with the more revolutionary traditions of the German workers' movement seemingly saw the struggle against Ulbricht as a continuation of their past struggles for a proletarian society.<sup>20</sup> In view of the rapid spread of the revolt across the DDR such phenomena must be interpreted as a wholesale disintegration of working class support for the SED.

On the evening of the 16th the Politbureau, which had already been divided on the issue, rescinded the norm increases. But this action was too little too late. The failure of either Grotewohl or Ulbricht to meet the protesters assembled in East Berlin led the insurgents to call for the developing strike to be generalized. In addition, news of the mass protest in the capital ignited similar responses throughout East Germany. In Halle, for example, over 50,000 demonstrators assembled in the city's market square while the local radio station was occupied by thirty strikers who broadcast communiques issued by the central organization arising out of the city-wide strike.

More radical still was a call issued by the strike committee in Bitterfeld. It advocated the formation of a provisional government composed of revolutionary workers.<sup>21</sup> The dynamic of the insurrection across the DDR was such that the strikes, demonstrations, and mass factory occupations

replaced and superseded one another.

Although the movement was wholly spontaneous in character it did achieve a degree of organization through the formation of strike committees sometimes representing entire cities or industrial regions. Nonetheless, the workers did not realize effective means of co-ordination beyond this. Often they were hampered by a complete lack of awareness of what was occurring even in other sections of the same enterprise.

The Ulbricht regime was paralyzed nonetheless because the revolt spread to the point where it affected over 250 centers. Matters were left to the Soviet Commandant in East Berlin, Major-General Dibrova, to save the SED government from collapse. He called out forces of Soviet tanks, armoured cars and lorry-borne infantry to restore order.<sup>22</sup> These forces soon overwhelmed the city's workers who were almost completely unarmed. Even so, the Soviet military's initial success was limited.

On June 18 the streets of East Berlin belonged to the Red Army. However, strikes persisted sometimes for weeks with the workers' demand shifting in favour of the release of imprisoned strikers. Furthermore, 80,000 miners struck in Erstegeberte beginning on the 18th. By the next day the entire mining region was in open insurrection. Soviet forces needed ten days to regain full control.<sup>23</sup>

The insurrection was confined principally to the working class. It was concentrated in the DDR's older

industrial regions. East German youth largely supported it but university students generally did not. The peasantry and the middle class did nothing. In view of this one cannot escape noticing that the social sector of the population which did not directly benefit from the New Course was the one which rebelled while those who directly gained something from it did not. Therefore, had the New Course included a reversal of the norm increases together with other concessions to the working class the revolt certainly would not have taken place or at least not at this time.

But the revolt was handicapped by more than its limited social base. Most decisively, it was doomed by the absence of major, simultaneous unrest elsewhere in Soviet-East Europe.

On balance, this first major example of social unrest in Soviet-East Europe was a clear failure. The rising not only failed to remove the Ulbricht regime but actually saved Ulbricht because it occurred just as the maneuvering within the SED Politbureau to topple him was reaching its climax. Therefore, had the rising not occurred at the moment it did a sweeping leadership change resulting in the initiation of a major reform programme may have taken place. What is more, Ulbricht saw his own vindication in the rising because he blamed it on the retreat from Stalinist orthodoxy.<sup>24</sup>

A decision by the Soviets once again proved decisive in this respect. Moscow opted to support Ulbricht against Zaisser and Herrnsdorf. Apparently the Soviets feared



sacrificing Ulbricht would be seen as a sign of weakness. Given how clear the lack of popular support for the SED government was, such 'weakness' could conceivably have led to the disintegration of the DDR as a Soviet-client state.<sup>25</sup>

The Soviets accordingly moved to solidify the stability of the DDR. East German reparations payments were abruptly terminated and the costs exacted to pay for the maintenance of Soviet troops in the DDR were reduced. Several months later the USSR moved to give the DDR more credibility by giving it full formal sovereignty. This included the right to conduct its own foreign policy.

The Soviets also exacted a price from Ulbricht in exchange for these measures of support and it too was designed to enhance the viability of the DDR. Ulbricht was forced to embrace the New Course. However, he did so for only as long as he had to. Thus, many of the concessions to civil society contained in the New Course were taken back within a year of the insurrection. By 1955 the New Course was formally abandoned. This meant that the workers' rising had salvaged not only Ulbricht's power but virtually all of the aspects of the social order identified with him.

Other developments in the aftermath of the insurrection were consistent with these events. For example, once the dust began to settle the regime's spokespersons were openly self-critical. On June 24th Grotewohl went so far as to state how "the guilt for the events of the past days rests with us."<sup>26</sup> But soon official accounts of the revolt

uniformly portrayed it as a counter-revolutionary putsch instigated by the West.

Economic concessions were likewise made as insurrection was ending. Wages rose. Food and clothing were suddenly abundant. The Free German Labour Union became more overtly concerned about defending its members living standards. But later the work norms which sparked the revolt were reimposed. Widespread repression also occurred together with the execution of strikers.

Generally, the substantial restoration of Stalinism in the DDR was evident by the Fourth SED Congress in 1954. It showed the Party was not going along with the general thaw evident in the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> This kind of intransigence would remain a general characteristic of Ulbricht's rule and would define the context within which future examples of dissent would be manifested.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Carola Stern, Ulbricht (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Manfred Grote, "The Socialist Unity Party of Germany", Stephen Fischer-Galati, ed., Communist Parties of Eastern Europe (Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Gyorgy, "East Germany", Vaclav Benes, Andrew Gyorgy and George Stambuk ed., Eastern European Government and Politics (Harper & Row, 1966), p. 110.

<sup>4</sup>Arthur M. Hanhardt Jr., "German Democratic Republic", Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone and Andrew Gyorgy, ed., Communism in Eastern Europe (Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 125.

<sup>5</sup>Chris Harman, Class Struggles in Eastern Europe (Pluto Press, 1983), p. 43.

<sup>6</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 111.

<sup>7</sup>Chris Harman, Op. Cit., p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>David Childs, The GDR: Moscow's German Ally (Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1983), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Roland Smith, "The Church in the German Democratic Republic", David Childs, ed., Honecker's Germany (Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1985), p. 70.

<sup>10</sup>Facts on File Vol. XII, p. 418.

<sup>11</sup>David Childs, Op. Cit., p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 139.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>14</sup>Chris Harman, Op. Cit., p. 79.

<sup>15</sup>A. Zauberman, Industrial Progress in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, quoted in Chris Harman, Class Struggles in Eastern Europe (Pluto Press, 1983), p. 75.

<sup>16</sup>Arthur M. Hanhardt Jr., The German Democratic Republic (John Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 56.

<sup>17</sup>Facts on File Vol. XI, p. 274.

<sup>18</sup>Cajo Brendl, The Working Class Uprising in East Germany June 1953 (Echanges et Mouvement, 1982), p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 148.

<sup>20</sup>Chris Harman, Op. Cit., p. 75.

<sup>21</sup>Cajo Brendl, Op. Cit., p. 20.

<sup>22</sup>Keesings Contemporary Archives Vol. X, p. 15268.

<sup>23</sup>Cajo Brendl, Op. Cit., p. 25.

<sup>24</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 148.

<sup>25</sup>Angela Stent, "Soviet Policy Toward the German Democratic Republic", Sarah M. Terry, ed., Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe (Yale University Press, 1984), p. 36.

<sup>26</sup>Keesings Contemporary Archives Vol. X, p. 15269.

<sup>27</sup>Manfred Grote, Op. Cit., p. 174.

## CHAPTER II

## 1956: THE IMPACT OF THE EAST BLOC CRISIS

In 1953 Stalin's death led to significant changes in the USSR. The Soviets accompanied these with pressure on the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) to begin to de-Stalinize the DDR. Similar developments would mark 1956 and principally began with the historic 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Nikita Khrushchev's blistering but carefully selective denunciation of Stalin on February 25th at the end of the congress marked an irretrievable step by him toward the creation of a new climate in the Soviet Union and in the Communist movement as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The reaction of top East bloc Communist Party leaders to Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" was quite unenthusiastic. To varying degrees they had committed the same kinds of crimes as Stalin. Furthermore, they had committed these within the past decade and they ruled younger, more vulnerable regimes lacking broad popular support.

Ulbricht was no exception. But at least he was not tainted by the kind of legacy created by the executions of top Party leaders which occurred in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Ulbricht was also first off the mark in distancing himself from Stalin although not from Stalin's system of government.

Just one week after Khrushchev's Secret Speech an article by Ulbricht appeared in the SED daily Neues

Deutschland. In it he declared that Stalin, despite his services in building Socialism had done "severe damage to the Soviet state and the Soviet Communist Party" by placing himself above the Party and that he could not be considered a classical Marxist author. Soon afterwards, Ulbricht went on to spell out his criticisms of Stalin in more detail. He included specific reference to the Great Purges of the mid to late 1930's.<sup>2</sup>

Another significant move came at the Party's Fifth Congress in late March 1956. DDR Premier Otto Grotewohl sharply rebuked the arbitrary way in which justice had been administered in East Germany. The SED then reprimanded the Minister of State Security and struck a special committee to investigate abuses in the judicial system. An amnesty followed in April in which some 20,000 people were released. Later on, a number of prominent victims of the Party's purges during the Stalinist era were politically rehabilitated. Among them was the one time "National Communist" Anton Ackermann.

These were important steps. But they were not truly indicative of the intent of the Ulbricht regime nor were they consistent with Ulbricht's basic distaste for Khrushchev's assault on Stalin. As in early 1953 Ulbricht was again determined to frustrate any major move towards de-Stalinization. He intended to pursue a course away from Stalinism only insofar as political circumstances left him no choice. Ulbricht likewise desired to reverse or at least

halt the process of reform as soon as it became opportune to do so. Ulbricht went so far as to try to turn the attention of the Party exclusively toward economic policies in the early spring of 1956. Such a maneuver amounted to wishful thinking. This was because Khrushchev's Secret Speech had set off a powerful reformist current within the ruling Party and among prominent circles in the East German intelligentsia.

Playwright Bertolt Brecht's activity in the summer of 1956 was indicative of where at least a section of the intelligentsia was heading at the time. During a meeting of writers and intellectuals he told those present that Ulbricht was an orthodox dictator who was alienated from the people, whose policies had completely destroyed the humanistic content of Socialism and who had created an intolerable situation within the DDR.<sup>3</sup> In effect, Brecht was taking advantage of the new possibilities available in 1956 for independent activity and using them to rally the intelligentsia against Ulbricht. This implied an attempt to facilitate a sweeping de-Stalinization of the East German system. Brecht had placed himself at the centre of the first significant manifestation of intellectual dissent in the history of the DDR.

The international context in which Brecht undertook this initiative was decisive. Events in Poland and Hungary were rapidly unfolding in a reformist direction with the intelligentsia playing a major role in both countries. This

was increasingly the case after the June 17, 1956 workers' rebellion in Poznan.

The impact of the Poznan events and its consequences within Poland on the DDR were considerable especially since they occurred less than four months after Khrushchev's attack on Stalin. At the official level the Poznan rebellion was a source of alarm and encouraged a hardened attitude towards reform. A measure of this official concern could be seen in the pages of Neues Deutschland. Shortly afterwards it stated that in the face of such developments "the workers' and peasants' state can be of steel-hard rigor."<sup>4</sup>

The effect on the growing movement for de-Stalinization was greater still. The fact that the Polish Party leadership gave in to the demands of the insurgent workers following the suppression of the rebellion inspired advocates of change within the SED. In their eyes the Polish Party had set an example worthy of imitation in the DDR. This view gained more and more credibility as Gomulka rose to power in the early autumn of 1956. The logical result was a commitment by these SED dissidents to see the realization of a Polish October in the DDR.<sup>5</sup>

Wolfgang Harich emerged as the principal figure in the emerging movement to transform the SED. A Party member since 1946 the youthful Harich was a prominent academic at East Berlin's Humbolt University who identified with the views of Ernst Bloch, an advocate of a more humanistic Socialism. He first identified himself as a Marxist critic



of the Ulbricht dictatorship in 1953 as did Brecht.<sup>6</sup> But it was the situation prevalent in the autumn of 1956 which made him truly significant.

Harich like Brecht was a member of the intelligentsia who remained loyal to the cause of Marxism. It was this loyalty which shaped their respective challenges to East German Stalinism. However, Harich distinguished himself from Brecht by articulating a comprehensive reform programme which he hoped the SED would adopt and which constituted the first consistent formulation of East German reform Communism to become known outside the DDR.<sup>7</sup>

The core of this programme expressed a desire to realize a specific German Road to Socialism 'cleansed of Stalinism'. As such it was in continuity with the original objectives of the SED. Similarly, Harich's programme emphasized the need for a return to the rule of law and to terminate the cult of the personality in the DDR. It called for the creation of Yugoslav-style workers' councils, a partial return to private enterprise and the cessation of forced agricultural collectivization. Intellectual freedom was also to be restored and there would be renewed official tolerance toward the churches.

Beyond these measures Harich went so far as to call for the liquidation of the secret police and complete sovereignty for the Volkskammer or East German parliament. Logically Harich firmly rejected the dogma that the Soviet Union's system was a model for other countries. With respect to the

DDR's international role Harich did not go as far as to advocate neutrality which is what the Hungarians were about to want. Instead Harich sought to have the DDR remain in the East block but as an equal partner with complete independence. This would mean the DDR, which owed its very existence to the Soviet Union, would be instrumental in ending Soviet dominance of the region and would follow the Yugoslav lead in challenging the USSR's then dominant role in the international Marxist-Leninist movement.<sup>8</sup>

This National Communist programme for democratization of the DDR was in tune with the spirit of the time in Eastern Europe. It placed Harich essentially on side with what Gomulka appeared to stand for and, even more so, with Nagy whose commitment to democratization was more genuine than the Polish leader's. But unlike them Harich was neither at the head of a powerful popular movement nor had anything resembling the strong support within civil society which Gomulka and Nagy both had in the autumn of 1956. Consequently, Harich together with his political programme suffered a severe handicap from the outset.

This handicap together with the DDR's weak international position and its dependence on the USSR shaped Harich's strategy for turning his programme into a political reality. Harich accordingly sought its realization by legal means naively hoping the SED leadership would freely adopt it. This did not happen. In fact Harich did not even find someone who dared to present his programme to the Party

leaders. In face of this obstacle Harich delivered it to the Soviet Embassy in Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

This action demonstrated Harich's incredible faith in the existing system and the good will of the Soviet leadership. Furthermore, Harich pursued official Soviet support while simultaneously maintaining contacts with the Petofi Circle in Budapest and West Germany's Social Democratic Party. Such links indicated a conviction that he could bridge the differences between these parties and the Soviets and achieve some degree of consensus in favour of his programme among all of them. In view of the reluctant Soviet acceptance of Gomulka such a notion may not have been completely implausible. But the invasion of Hungary would abruptly prove it was fantasy.

If Harich's naivety seemed to know almost no limits the same was true of his political ambitions. Specifically, Harich's contacts with the West German social democrats showed he wanted more than a sweeping transformation in the DDR. He also wanted to facilitate German re-unification. It was Harich's view that the prospects for re-unifying Germany would greatly improve given the adoption of his programme by the SED.

Those involved with Harich in the movement for sweeping reform scored only one success of note. They managed to have Gomulka's October 20, 1956 speech in which the new Polish leader set out his reform programme, secretly published in the DDR. This was done in defiance of

opposition from Ulbricht and indicated a significant degree of reformist sentiment in the Party. Nonetheless, Harich's grand designs would come to nothing. In a matter of days the Hungarian events would guarantee this as the Soviet invasion demonstrated the very real limits of Moscow's tolerance of change in the East bloc. Harich did not appreciate these limits and the terms of his programme clearly put them to the test.

Harich was arrested in late November together with a number of his political allies. In March 1957 he received a sentence of ten years imprisonment at hard labour for allegedly 'conspiring to overthrow the East German government'.<sup>10</sup> Most of Harich's sentence would be served. But these measures alone were obviously deemed insufficient. The theories of Harich's mentor, Ernst Bloch, also had to be subjected to official condemnation. This occurred at a swiftly convened theoretical conference in Leipzig.<sup>11</sup> Both the heresy and the heretic had to be decisively crushed.

Repression was also employed to silence real or potential sources of unrest at the time. Meetings of writers, artists and journalists at East Berlin's Club der Kulturschaffenden were stopped effectively eliminating the DDR's equivalent of Hungary's Petofi Circle. Manifestations of student unrest aimed at achieving greater intellectual freedom, university education free from SED control and freedom for students to form their own organizations took place. These were halted through a combination of official

stalling tactics and strong arm methods.

Open dissent by workers was minimal. Yet Ulbricht resorted to preventative measures designed to turn them against the students and intellectuals. These moves were followed by a new economic package in the months immediately after the Hungarian Revolution. It included the introduction of a 45 hour work week, pension increases and an expanded program of housing construction.<sup>12</sup> Such initiatives showed that the memory of June 1953 was still fresh in the minds of Ulbricht and of the workers.

Ulbricht felt vindicated by the Hungarian Revolution much as he had felt vindicated by the June 1953 insurrection in his own domain. Earlier on he had warned against the Soviet supported ouster of the Stalinist Rakosi from power in Hungary. Ulbricht had also called for a crackdown on the anti-Stalinist Petofi Circle. The East German leader understood how the course of events which began with Khrushchev's attack on Stalin threatened the stability of the region and the very system he ruled in the DDR. After all, had not these developments facilitated the formulation of Harich's programme for the wholesale de-Stalinization of East Germany and thereby potentially enhanced the possibilities for German reunification? And would not Harich's aims mean the political demise of Ulbricht and perhaps the dissolution of the state he dominated?

The Hungarian Revolution was also Ulbricht's salvation regardless of the naivety of Harich's initiatives. It

directly led to a new re-affirmation of Soviet support for him. More importantly still, the Revolution facilitated the systematic reversal of much of Gomulka's reform programme in Poland and led to an immediate conservative shift in Soviet policy direction. As a result, support for democratic reforms and a National Communist course for the DDR lost much of whatever ideological legitimacy it had within the ruling SED.

Nonetheless, the fragile nature of the DDR in the 1950's would not allow Ulbricht to remain secure after the 1956 East bloc crisis began to dissipate. He would face two new challenges by 1958.

One of these was a new form of internal Party dissent. It arose from an unlikely source. Namely, this dissent came from economic planners associated with the Minister of Heavy Industry, Fritz Selbmann. These technocratic critics opposed Ulbricht's ideologically orthodox economic and administrative policies as harsh and misguided. They were heavily punished as a result.<sup>13</sup>

The Minister of State Security Ernst Wollweber and Secretary of the Central Committee Karl Schirdewan mounted the other challenge to Ulbricht. This, however, was not a manifestation of dissent. It was a struggle for power by two leading moderates within the SED leadership. These individuals attacked Ulbricht for his incompetence and failure to account for the unique qualities of the DDR. They were nonetheless not seeking changes which would lead

to a sweeping transformation of the existing order and sought Moscow's backing amidst the post-1956 political climate.

Wollweber and Schirdewan lost and were purged. This occurred for much the same reason Zaisser and Herrnsstadt failed in 1953. Specifically, a power struggle in the Soviet Communist Party had worked to the advantage of Ulbricht.<sup>14</sup> Extensive purges followed throughout the ranks of the SED. Due to these events and later developments such as the marked increase in the viability of the DDR following the erection of the Berlin Wall Ulbricht would be able to exert virtually unchallenged control of the SED until 1971 when the USSR finally turned against him.

Looking at the DDR in the 1950's two phenomena concerning dissent and critical thought become quite apparent. One is the way in which the DDR's dependency on the Soviet Union for its very existence profoundly affected expressions of East German dissent. Thus, the combined effects of the June 1953 workers' insurrection and the Hungarian Revolution smothered whatever possibilities there were for the emergence of a sustained movement of dissent. In particular, this was accomplished by the silencing of social groups capable of facilitating such a movement and by enabling the continuation of a neo-Stalinist system of rule in the DDR.

The Soviet factor was decisive at nearly every juncture. The USSR facilitated the foundation of the DDR through the roles played by the emigre Ulbricht Group in the

German Communist Party and the Soviet Military Administration. Then the Soviet system was imposed on East Germany through the policies of a Stalinist ruling party led by the USSR's most trusted German, Walter Ulbricht.

The Soviet-imposed system was likewise modified right after Stalin's death. This was done at the USSR's insistence. Ulbricht's views counted for little as the institution of the New Course demonstrated.

By overseeing the construction of the DDR's social system prior to Stalin's death and by being instrumental in its modification in the months immediately afterwards the USSR, in effect, set the stage for the spontaneous, massive outburst of dissent in June 1953. The USSR was also responsible for crushing that dissent when the East German workers brought the Ulbricht regime to its knees. Furthermore, it was the USSR which kept Ulbricht in power despite his thorough lack of popular support and a major challenge to his leadership emanating from within the SED Politbureau.

Ulbricht's subsequent resistance to further de-Stalinization measures during 1954-55 was not of crucial importance although it did exemplify a degree of insubordination which would be repeated with greater consequence years later. As a result, in the face of Khrushchev's attack on Stalin, Ulbricht could mount only partially effective resistance to new pressure for change. With respect to dissent it was this major turning point in the history of the Soviet Party which set in motion the course of East



German dissent in 1956. It was similarly the Soviet move to crush the Hungarian Revolution which was decisive in silencing this second and final major manifestation of dissent in the DDR in the 1950's.

As noted, the combined effects of the June 1953 events and those during 1956 in Hungary smothered any chance of a sustained movement of dissent emerging in the DDR. Recognition of whose aspirations were crushed in the process facilitates an understanding as to why.

In June 1953 it was principally the workers whose aspirations were crushed since it was almost exclusively their insurrection. Consequently, the will to resist within the section of society possessing the greatest capacity to confront the regime was broken. Owing to the imposition of this forced passivity by Soviet tanks the Ulbricht regime enjoyed the strong prospect that future manifestations of dissent within East German civil society would remain marginal and, hence, much easier to cope with.

1956 certainly bore this out. Relative worker passivity together with continued silence on the part of the peasantry during this year of bloc-wide crisis prevented the occurrence of anything as profound as the Hungarian Revolution or even the Poznan rebellion in Poland. Dissent within civil society was confined primarily to students at some universities and the numerically small intelligentsia.

Due to this, the only threatening dissent emerged from within the SED and these Marxist dissidents were seriously

handicapped by their lack of support within and their alienation from a civil society which did not distinguish them from the Ulbricht regime.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Harich, this problem together with the weak, dependent nature of the East German state compelled him and his associates in the SED to naively aspire through legal means to secure, on the one hand, the support of the Party leadership for their programme and support from outside the DDR, particularly in Moscow, on the other. They did this despite the essentially subversive nature of their programmatic goals.

The suppression of the Hungarian insurgents spelled the political demise of these critics and their aspirations within the SED. It also spelled the demise of the aspirations of the dissatisfied university students and members of the critical intelligentsia. Nonetheless, the goals of all three were not repressed as severely as the workers' aspirations had been in June 1953 primarily because their actions did not lead to such a volatile internal situation. Hence, the possibility of these groups making new expressions of dissent remained less remote.

Overall, the combined effects of both insurrections was still overwhelming in terms of dampening social resistance within East German civil society. The effects were less substantial within the SED. This was shown by the technocrats' dissent in 1958.

The possibilities for further dissent were also seriously impaired in 1953 and 1958 when challenges to

Ulbricht from other SED leaders were defeated. Had any of these struggles for power succeeded this could have resulted in a more liberal, less repressive regime. Under such circumstances the possibilities for social resistance in the DDR would almost certainly have proven better. Potential critics would probably have found it easier to acquire 'space' or the room to maneuver so essential to engaging in durable independent political activity. Possibilities for social experimentation by sectors of the ruling elite which would be conducive to independent political activism may also have emerged.

If all of these phenomena are considered together the gravity of the combined impact of June 1953 and the Hungarian Revolution starts to become clear. Manifestations of dissent and critical thought were now certain to be essentially isolated phenomena confined to individuals or specific groups for quite some time to come. Nonetheless, dissent would continue to constitute a potential threat to the regime due to the systemic weaknesses of the DDR.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Roy A. Medvedev and Zhores A. Medvedev, Khrushchev: The Years in Power (W.N. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>Keesings Contemporary Archives, Vol. X, p. 14818.

<sup>3</sup>Carola Stern, Ulbricht (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), p. 158.

<sup>4</sup>Facts on File, Vol. XVI, p. 218.

<sup>5</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 161.

<sup>6</sup>Fritz Radditz, "The Case of Wolfgang Harich", Encounter, Vol. XXIV No. 2, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup>Heinz Lippmann, "The Limits of Reform Communism", Problems of Communism, Vol. XIX No. 3, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Fritz Radditz, Op. Cit., p. 161.

<sup>9</sup>Arthur M. Hanhardt Jr., The German Democratic Republic, (John Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 69.

<sup>10</sup>Facts on File, Vol. XVII, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Demetz, "Literature in Ulbricht's Germany", Problems of Communism, Vol. XI No. 4, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 166.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Gyorgy, "East Germany", Vaclav Benes, Andrew Gyorgy and George Stambuk ed., East European Government and Politics (Harper & Row, 1966), p. 117.

<sup>14</sup>Carola Stern, Op. Cit., p. 169.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

## CHAPTER III

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH  
AND THE BERLIN WALL

Before proceeding with an examination of dissent from the 1960's onwards two vital and partially related subjects affecting the evolution of the domestic politics of the DDR merit attention. One is the development of the Church-State relationship. The other is the impact of the construction of the Berlin Wall.

As noted before, during the formative years of the DDR up until Stalin's death, religious expression was under attack to the point where religion was almost completely removed from the school system and harassment of the churches had become systematic. The official onslaught only abated after Stalin's death and even then the Church-State relationship remained very difficult. Confrontations persisted and the SED continued to pursue a divide and conquer strategy which would only allow for a wholly subordinate and dwindling religious community in the DDR.

Two issues were outstanding in sustaining the antagonistic nature of the relationship during the 1950's and into the 1960's. One was the introduction in 1954 of the Jugendweihe or official Youth Dedication. This was initiated by the SED and directed at 14 year olds. Atheistic in content, the Youth Dedication has constituted a secular equivalent of confirmation in which the participant makes an affirmation to the State, to Socialism,

to friendship with the USSR and pledges his or herself to give one's best at school and at work.<sup>1</sup> The move epitomized the Party's determination to socialize youth according to official values and to push the churches to the margins of East German society where their role would be restricted to holding purely religious services.<sup>2</sup>

The Protestant Evangelical Church, which is by far the DDR's largest and most influential, stubbornly resisted the initiation of the Youth Dedication. It considered this rite a violation of the DDR Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom. The Protestant Church responded by refusing confirmation to anyone who took the *Jugenweihe*. However, the SED effectively countered by making the official rite a necessary condition for advanced schooling and entrance to the professions.<sup>3</sup>

The Church was faced with the certainty of many young East Germans opting for the Youth Dedication despite its wishes and accordingly distancing themselves from organized religion for the sake of their futures. In short, the future viability of the Protestant Church was put in jeopardy. So it gave in. The DDR's main Church began to confirm youths who had taken the Youth Dedication which, by 1958, was next to obligatory for everyone in East Germany. The Protestant Church had made a major concession to the political status quo.

A similar outcome marked the other particularly contentious issue affecting the course of Church-State

relations. This involved the Protestant Church's institutional ties to its West German counterpart through the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). The SED came to adopt an increasingly dim view of this bond particularly as the prospects for German re-unification on terms suitable to the ruling East German Party became more remote.

Among other things this relationship had the undesired effect of encouraging the view that the East German state was a passing phenomenon. It was also seen as an indestructible tie between East and West Germany. Perceptions like these were thorns in the side of a ruling party locked in an international diplomatic struggle with the government in Bonn over the legitimacy of the East German state and still trying to win the acceptance of its own population. These facts exemplify why the SED became ever more determined to force the East German Protestant Church to separate from its West German counterpart.

West Germany's entrance into NATO and the formation of the West German armed forces gave the SED an ideal opportunity to press the matter because these developments led to the 1957 Military Chaplaincy Agreement. Through it the EKD provided West German soldiers with the services of military chaplains. This created a tangible link between the West German military, NATO and the East German Protestant Church. Ulbricht quickly exploited the issue going so far as to accuse the EKD of overtly approving NATO policies, West German rearmament and the use of atomic warfare.<sup>4</sup>

Later, the SED succeeded in initiating a process of separation by keeping Protestant Evangelicals in the DDR from meeting their West German counterparts by refusing to allow the Synod of the United Evangelical Church in Germany to meet in East Berlin in 1961.<sup>5</sup> Final separation came eight years later on June 10, 1969. On that date the Synod of the Federation of Evangelical Churches (Kirchenbund) of the DDR was formed.

These developments had the cumulative effect of compelling the main church in the DDR to accept the realities of a viable, sovereign East German state administering an essentially Soviet-model social system. For the SED this acceptance was a major political victory and a vital step in the process of East German nation building. It also facilitated the emergence of a new Church-State relationship based on accommodation especially between their respective hierarchies. This in turn would help to guarantee the Church's status as an independent institution in East German society. The character of the new role of the Church was most succinctly stated by Bishop Albert Schonherr of Berlin in 1971. He said, "We wish to be a Church within Socialism."<sup>6</sup>

Within this kind of framework Church-State relations experienced substantial improvements during the 1970's. But because the new accommodation was more focused at the top of these institutions the potential for new tensions was much greater at the lower levels and this is where new



manifestations of conflict arose. Thus, individual Christians continued to suffer direct or indirect discrimination on a regular basis. Similarly, low-level SED officials often persisted in maintaining a hard line towards religion.

The suicide burnings by Pastor Oskar Brusewitz in 1976 and Pastor Rolf Gunther in 1978 exemplified the sometimes sharp contrast between sentiments within the Church hierarchy and at the base levels as these spectacular incidents of dissent testified to the anguish felt by at least some Christians over their perceived plight in the DDR. As could be expected, Pastor Brusewitz's suicide horrified both Party and Church officials.

The impact of these in combination with a visible rise in popular discontent in the DDR in the latter 1970's facilitated a milestone in the improving Church-State relationship. This was the historic March 6, 1978 meeting between SED Chairperson Erich Honecker and Bishop Schonherr. It resulted in the conclusion of agreements which were hailed as constituting a model of what relations should be between Church and State in a Socialist country.

At this meeting Honecker spoke of the Protestant Church as a socially significant, self-supporting organization. Schonherr somewhat similarly spoke of the need for space, both materially and in ideas, in which the Church communities could work, worship and carry on their educational programs.<sup>9</sup> The multi-faceted agreements included provisions

giving the Church increased access to the official electronic media, greater possibilities to import literature from the West for ecumenical purposes and opened channels through which it could address charges of discrimination against Christians. Terms such as these empowered the East German Protestant Church with privileges which are unequalled in any other Soviet bloc state with the obvious exception of Poland.

With respect to the possibilities for dissent and critical thought in the DDR the situation established through the March 6th agreements was indeed significant. In a manner also similar to Poland the achievement of an understanding between the Church and the State entrenched the position of the Protestant Church as a powerful, independent institution within an East bloc society. This likewise meant the consolidation of the position of the one major, non-official institution empowered with the right of free assembly. And in the case of the DDR the Protestant Church would distinguish itself as a forum for public appearances by artists and writers on a scale incomparable to that of the churches in the West.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, this was true in society in which the intelligentsia has been the most consistent source of dissent and critical thought.

Nonetheless, in stating these things it must be noted that the situation differs with respect to East Germany's smaller, less influential Roman Catholic Church. It has consistently shied away from public affairs by limiting

itself to pastoral work. The Catholic Church has also adopted a different path by viewing the concept of 'The Church in Socialism' with suspicion. Still, the East German Catholic Church has similarly felt the need to come to terms with the SED ruled state by accepting it as a fact in order to avoid conflicts which prove fruitless.<sup>11</sup>

The East German government's action in 1961 in preventing a meeting between East and West German Protestant Evangelicals in East Berlin as a way to push for the establishment of a separate DDR Protestant Church was also consistent in intent with its most important initiative of the same year, the construction of the Berlin Wall. Subsequent history has shown how that action made August 13, 1961 a decisive turning point in the history of the DDR. It similarly had a profound impact on the nature of East German dissent and critical thought. In particular, the construction of The Wall had the effect of shaping the context within which these phenomena would occur as well as their content and objectives.

Regardless, the foremost purpose for constructing what would constitute the most deadly border in the history of the modern world was to secure the future existence of the DDR. This was so because in August 1961 the East German state's very survival was increasingly in doubt owing to the massive exodus of its citizens westward. From 1949 through to the end of 1961 this state which ruled a population of about 17 million people had nearly 2.5 million emigrate.

What is more, during the period just prior to The Wall's construction the rate of emigration had risen to nearly 2000 persons per day.<sup>12</sup>

The type of people who were leaving particularly exemplified the seriousness of the situation. They included East Germany's most skilled and productive citizens. Almost half of those who fled in 1961 were under 25 years old. Perhaps as many as one quarter of those who left from 1949 onwards were members of the technical intelligentsia. During 1960 and 1961 a great many were farmers who departed in response to a sweeping agricultural collectivization. All told, the depletion of economic skills and productive abilities threatened to devastate an economy already burdened by shortages of all kinds and serious inefficiencies. Simply stated, the Berlin Wall was a means to avert a possible collapse and lay the basis for a revival of the DDR's economy. The political survival of the SED required nothing less.

The Berlin Wall also served an explicitly diplomatic purpose related to the preservation of the East German state. Specifically, its construction was sanctioned by Khrushchev as a tactic to compel the West to recognize the DDR and end the diplomatic isolation imposed on the East German state through Bonn's Hallstein Doctrine. Achieving this acceptance of the status quo in Germany was essential if the USSR was to realize its larger objective of Western recognition of the status quo in Europe.<sup>13</sup> This, in turn,

would enable the USSR to pursue a more flexible policy toward both German states.

The domestic impact of the construction of the Berlin Wall was far-reaching and multi-faceted. Now, for the first time since the DDR's establishment the SED leadership could begin to consolidate its regime within its own borders. As a consequence the East German population was forced to either accept or oppose the system without the alternative of leaving.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, with the uncertainty over the DDR's survival sharply diminished by this watershed event the effective, systematic and durable honing of a Soviet model society was far more possible.

Yet, initially, this was not what happened. There was instead a clear shift toward liberalization and the start of an important period of reform. This was especially true with respect to the economy and, like the policy decision to build The Wall, the subsequent push for reform was understood as a political strategy designed to consolidate SED rule.

The reform package was named the New Economic System (NES). The NES involved partial moves toward a market economy intended to resolve the inefficiencies of a centrally planned economy by giving a share of responsibility to individual concerns.<sup>15</sup> This initiative lasted from 1962 to 1967 and was in large measure responsible for the achievement of what has since been termed the 'East German Economic Miracle.'

The resulting economic progress together with a political relaxation by the SED which lasted until the end of 1965 in turn facilitated greater acceptance of the social system by the population and even fostered the emergence of a certain national pride in the accomplishments of the DDR. Indeed, by 1963 a sense of East German national identity began to appear. Ulbricht took the lead in encouraging this by making "national interest" and "national economy" common phrases in the lexicon of East German officialdom.<sup>16</sup>

The process of consolidation was quite apparent in military terms as well. After the Berlin Wall went up so did the military value of East Germany's National People's Army (NVA). As a result the NVA became an increasingly important component of the Warsaw Pact's armed forces. This process culminated in the DDR's assumption of a 'Junior Partner' role in the Soviet-dominated East bloc military alliance.

Clearly then, what happened on August 13, 1961 was a major turning point. With respect to dissent and critical thought, as noted, anyone who was not content now had to learn to accept the DDR's system or work to change it. The Wall also shattered almost all hope of there being a substantive return to political pluralism of the kind which existed in 1946. Furthermore, as the prospects for a united Germany faded whatever prospects for change which survived necessarily became much more exclusively focused on the DDR itself. Realities such as these necessarily precluded

anything more than a gradualist, reform-oriented strategy for political change for the foreseeable future if not longer. Furthermore, the facts of the Soviet-DDR relationship along with the repressive nature of SED rule dictated that even movement of this nature would have to be guided by considerable caution.

Within this context initiatives for reform would necessarily have two principal focal points. One would be the SED which did have a loosely constituted liberal leadership faction alongside centrist and conservative or Stalinist ones. The other would be the Protestant Church for reasons already noted.

Thus, in the period leading up to the 1980's, the leading critics of the East German government would turn out to be principally either SED members or persons who in some way associated themselves with the Protestant Church. Accordingly, the ideas espoused by these dissenters would mainly be Marxist or Christian influenced. Within this framework phenomena akin to Eurocommunism would surface and those responsible would be subjected to official vilification by a still vulnerable and fearful ruling elite.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Roland Smith, "The Church in the German Democratic Republic", David Childs, ed., Honecker's Germany (Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>Kurt Sontheimer and Wilham Bleek, The Government and Politics of East Germany (Hutchinson & Co., 1975), p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>George H. Brand, "The Status of Religion in the German Democratic Republic", Bohdan R. Bociurkiw and John W. Strong, ed., Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe (University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 265.

<sup>4</sup>. Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>5</sup>James Bentley, Between Marx and Christ (Verso Editions, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>John Sanford, The Sword and the Ploughshare: Autonomous Peace Initiatives in East Germany (Merlin Press/European Nuclear Disarmament, 1983), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>Robert F. Goeckel, "The Kirchenpolitik of the German Democratic Republic and the Evangelical Churches, 1968-78", Studies in GDR Culture and Society (University of America Press, 1981), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup>Roland Smith, Op. Cit., p. 74.

<sup>9</sup>Nancy Luckens, "The GDR Churches After 30 Years - Notes of an Interested Observer", Studies in GDR Culture and Society (University of America Press, 1981), p. 101.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>11</sup>Kurt Sontheimer and Wilhelm Bleek, Op. Cit., p. 125.

<sup>12</sup>Angela Stent, "Soviet Policy Toward the German Democratic", Sarah M. Terry, ed., Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe (Yale University Press, 1984), p. 37.

<sup>13</sup>Jean Edward Smith, Germany Beyond the Wall (Little, Brown & Co., 1967), p. 132.

<sup>14</sup>Arthur M. Hanhardt Jr., "German Democratic Republic", Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone and Andrew Gyorgy ed., Communism in Eastern Europe (Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 132.

<sup>15</sup>Kurt Sontheimer and Wilhelm Bleek, Op. Cit., p. 147.

<sup>16</sup>Peter C. Ludz, "Continuity and Change Since Ulbricht", Problems of Communism, Vol. XXXI No. 2, p. 57.



## CHAPTER IV

## INTELLECTUAL DISSENT IN THE 1960's AND 1970's

The tendency for the manifestations of dissent and critical thought which appeared after August 13, 1961 to either emerge from within the ranks of the ruling Party or to be linked to the churches was, in part, highlighted by the persons who became both the leading critics of the government during the 1960's and 1970's and the mainstays of oppositional activity. Robert Havemann, Wolf Biermann, Stefan Heym and Christa Wolf were foremost among them. Rudolph Bahro and Reiner Kunze also proved to be of considerable importance.

The father figure, as it were, of dissent in the DDR was the late Robert Havemann. A life-long Communist, Havemann joined the German Communist Party before the Second World War. He was jailed for this reason during the Nazi period. Havemann even shared residence in Berlin's Brandenburg Prison with the current SED First Secretary Erich Honecker.<sup>1</sup> After the SED took power Havemann became a member of the Volkskammer or East German Parliament. These personal credentials worked in his favour when he became a dissident and as a result he suffered neither prison terms nor forced exile.

1956 was a turning point for Havemann just as it was for many East German intellectuals. Khrushchev's attack on Stalin came as a shock to him. It moved Havemann to break with Stalinism and get involved in the intellectual ferment

of the time. Nonetheless, Havemann did not gain notoriety as a political heretic until 1963-64 when the DDR was experiencing perhaps its most liberal period to date. These were the years in which Dr. Havemann delivered a series of defiant and highly popular lectures at East Berlin's prestigious Humbolt University, the residence of many of the DDR's internal critics over the years. Havemann's lectures openly challenged the Party's ideological orthodoxy. In them he reiterated an earlier demand of his for a clear dividing line between science and official dogma. Havemann challenged the SED's line on a number of other key ideological issues as well.

By this time Havemann's aversion to Stalinism was very clear. He equated it with Bonapartism. Stalinism, in his view, was a perversion of the essentially democratic character of Socialism. This kind of perspective was highlighted in a 1964 interview where he stated,

Not as one disappointed in the socialist idea but as its confirmed partisan I demand the total eradication of Stalinism and dogmatism in all their manifestations. Our goal must be a social order in which Libertarian Socialism has been given reality.<sup>2</sup>

The SED leadership considered these openly expressed views and Havemann's series of critical lectures at Humbolt intolerable. Consequently, the SED Central Committee officially condemned Havemann in early 1964 then expelled him from the Party and stripped him of his academic title at Humbolt.<sup>3</sup> He remained undaunted.

Four years later Czechoslovakia was in the midst of its Prague Spring. Havemann, who had come to believe that tension between 'the State and the masses' would elicit the 'second phase of the Socialist Revolution', was understandably enthusiastic. Dubcek's experiment seemed to vindicate his conception. Accordingly, years after the Prague Spring was brought to an abrupt end Havemann held firm to the view that a Prague Spring is an historic inevitability in all socialist countries.<sup>4</sup>

Havemann saw the Warsaw Pact invasion as a grave political blunder which the Soviets would eventually have to acknowledge. His sons, who were obviously influenced by his views, went beyond words and took protest action. They were arrested as a result.

In the years which followed, Havemann's ideas drew increasingly close to those of the main West European Communist Parties which had also condemned the invasion as contrary to the best interests of Socialism. By 1979 Havemann clearly felt a bond with the Eurocommunist cause. In a statement marking the 30th anniversary of the founding of the DDR he wrote,

If we in the DDR were finally to begin the construction of the Socialism of which our Eurocommunist comrades dream, so that they would no longer be forced to distance themselves from our Actually Existing Socialism, then the DDR together with the other socialist countries could become the pacemaker of the great socialist turn in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

In the same statement Havemann went on to demand the

abolition of censorship, the establishment of an independent newspaper and the release of DDR citizens jailed for free expression.

Havemann was quite pointed in viewing the absence of intellectual freedom as the DDR's greatest flaw. In his essay Freedom As Necessity he attributes the economic failure of Socialism and its declining international standing to the lack of democratic rights. This shortcoming is, in Havemann's view, the decisive brake on development in what he terms 'the pseudo-socialist countries'.

Havemann believed the prevalent 'unfreedom' has to be blown apart as a prerequisite for any chance of realizing true Socialism. Significantly, Havemann considered the freedom he envisions as qualitatively superior to the freedom which exists in the West. Havemann's objective was a material freedom and independence for the individual based upon dependence only on the socialist community as a whole, on its culture and maturity.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this period Havemann endured systematic harassment. The State's campaign of persecution peaked in the last half of the 1970's. During this time he was placed under house arrest for two and one half years and at various times had up to 200 members of the People's Police stationed around his home. Havemann's ordeal never fully ended until after his death in April 1982. There was even a police presence at the burial of this mainstay of oppositional activity who during his last year gained recognition as an

inspiration for the DDR's autonomous peace movement.

Havemann's ability to remain in the DDR until his death without experiencing a fate worse than house arrest was not shared by his friend and fellow activist Wolf Biermann. He would be expelled. Together, these two individuals formed the centre of intellectual resistance in the DDR from the mid-1960's until the late 1970's. Havemann and Biermann had much in common. They even emerged as figures within the critical intelligentsia at the same institution, Humbolt University, where Biermann, another convinced Marxist, studied. At Humbolt Wolf Biermann became involved in Bertolt Brecht's theatre group and soon found himself at odds with the SED's cultural policies. By 1963, he was also having problems with the Party's censors and was marked as an oppositionist, expelled from the SED and banned from making public appearances. As a balladeer, Biermann's later to be famous songs with their politically incisive lyrics were restricted to circulation within an informal audience of like-minded critics of the SED who exchanged tape recordings of them.<sup>7</sup>

Wolf Biermann was a cultural figure. Consequently, the treatment he experienced corresponded closely to shifts in SED cultural policy. This was demonstrated when the period of liberalization which followed the erection of the Berlin Wall was terminated in 1965 with no further significant relaxation until Honecker replaced Ulbricht in 1971. Thus, at the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in

December 1965 during which Honecker gave the Politbureau report signalling a return to rigid cultural policies, Biermann was made the principal object of official criticism. Thanks to this newly acquired notoriety Biermann would only be permitted to make two public appearances in the DDR over the next eleven years.

The Prague Spring made a major impression on Biermann who now felt that 'reactionary Stalinist bureaucrats' at the top of the SED hierarchy constituted the real enemies of Socialism in the DDR. Biermann did not simply react to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia by denouncing it. He echoed views similar to Havemann's. In one of his songs he wrote, "The Paris Commune lives on in Prague, the Revolution frees itself."

Political freedom was another concern Biermann shared with Havemann. Biermann also shared this concern and a strong affinity with the late Rosa Luxemburg. She contended,

Without general elections, without unlimited freedom of the press and assembly, without the free struggle of opinions, life dies out in all public institutions; it is transformed into a fictitious life wherein only the bureaucracy remains the active element.<sup>8</sup>

Yet it is significant that Biermann, like Havemann, still viewed the DDR as the better Germany since it had eliminated capitalist private property forms.

Not surprisingly, Biermann gravitated towards Eurocommunism. He saw the Eurocommunist transformation of the

leading West European Communist Parties as a gratifying and remarkable development. Biermann delighted at the June 1976 East Berlin Conference of workers' parties where the Eurocommunists made their presence felt in a major way and where the SED leadership was compelled to give their ideas an unprecedented degree of exposure within the DDR.

Very soon afterwards Erich Honecker and his colleagues decided they had had enough of the DDR's Eurocommunist balladeer. In November 1976 they dealt with Biermann by granting him a temporary exit visa to perform a series of concerts for the West German Metal Workers Union. Once he was out of the DDR the Party had the door shut behind him citing the critical nature of the performances he gave as justification for the expulsion. In particular, the official daily Neues Deutschland charged Biermann with "gross violation of his civic duties and a hostile performance directed at our socialist state."<sup>9</sup> The paper also called him an 'anti-communist rowdy'. No doubt the Party's indignation was increased by the fact that millions of East Germans had been given the opportunity to view Biermann in concert thanks to a West German television broadcast of one of his performances.

The expulsion set off a relative storm of protest in the DDR and across Europe. Among those who condemned the SED's action were the Eurocommunists. This brought the SED-Eurocommunist relationship to a new low.

Within the DDR students in Jena joined forces with

local workers in collecting several hundred signatures on a protest petition. Expressions of solidarity also came out of factories in East Berlin. Slogans appeared on walls around the capital denouncing the expulsion while wreaths were anonymously placed at popular landmarks which Biermann had sung about in his songs. Elsewhere, in Erfurt, a young stagehand received a prison sentence for collecting signatures on a petition.

The action against Biermann brought the long-standing tensions between the Party and the critical intelligentsia to a head. Fearing that Biermann's expulsion marked the start of a return to Stalinist policies twelve leading East German writers signed an open letter to the SED leadership urging it to reverse the expulsion decision. Neues Deutschland refused their request to have it published. Yet, within days word of the letter had spread sufficiently that approximately 100 more people signed it.

To the SED leaders this was a provocation. They believed the storm of protest was in fact the work of Biermann's friend Robert Havemann. As a result, a vigorous attack was launched against the intellectual critics and anyone else the Party could single out.<sup>10</sup> The subjection of Havemann to prolonged house arrest was set in this atmosphere. Specifically, the official action was a response to Havemann having a letter of his own protesting the expulsion published in West Germany's Der Spiegel magazine. Meanwhile, author Christa Wolf, who at one time had been a



candidate member of the SED Central Committee, was expelled from both the Party and the Berlin Committee of the Writers' Federation for having joined the chorus of protest.

Others suffered worse fates. A year after the uproar had subsided it was apparent that at least twenty persons had been jailed and dozens of others had been forced to leave the DDR. This was the level of repression the Party leadership deemed necessary given that the wave of protests had involved several hundred artists and poets and had even led to the formation of an intelligentsia-based Committee for the Defense of Freedom and Socialism in East Berlin.

Still more repression followed. Determined to adopt a tougher overall stance towards dissent the Party submitted "catch-all" legislation to the Volkskammer for formal approval. Consequently, laws which widened the legal definitions of what constituted a 'crime' against the DDR were passed in April 1977 and in June 1979. One particular amendment set out a new crime termed 'public defamation of the DDR' which was clearly aimed at the critical intelligentsia. The 1979 legislation specifically toughened existing penalties for and addressed the problem of 'illegal contacts' with foreigners for the purpose of assisting in the publication abroad of material harmful to the DDR.<sup>11</sup> The intent of this law was clear given the tendency of East German dissident writers to evade official censorship by having their work published in West Germany.

Prominent East German writer and political critic

Stefan Heym responded to the State's onslaught by vowing to continue to fight for the full implementation of the provisions of the DDR constitution guaranteeing the right to free speech. Heym, who once said, "I don't live in the DDR to keep my mouth shut.", is yet another one of East Germany's long-standing critics who is still loyal to Marxist Socialism.<sup>12</sup>

Heym's commitment to Socialism can be traced back to Germany's pre-Nazi period. It prompted him to choose to live in the DDR and to support its early social transformation. However, Heym had his illusions about the DDR shattered by the June 1953 workers' uprising. By 1956 he was at odds with what he had come to see as the adverse effects of SED orthodoxy on the quality of East German literary work.

What stands out about Heym is his determination to stay in the DDR and make life better there. By the mid-1960's his commitment to fostering a more democratic, intellectually open society was earning him sustained official scorn. Thus, in December 1965, he shared Biermann's distinction of being attacked by Erich Honecker at the 11th Central Committee Plenum.

The year 1965 was also significant insofar as it was then that Stefan Heym's The Boredom of Minsk appeared. This work contained the following four point manifesto concerning cultural freedom.

1. The Party has no monopoly of the truth.

2. There is an imminent conflict between writers and functionaries.
3. Taboos have to be disregarded.
4. Hardship has to be accepted while pursuing the first three principles.<sup>13</sup>

One of Heym's later works, The King David Report, showed he meant what he said about taboos. In this work Heym dealt with probably the most sensitive East German taboo of them all. Namely, he wrote about the DDR's experiences with Stalinism and Stalinism's residual presence in contemporary East German society.

Stefan Heym similarly meant what he said with respect to enduring hardship. As one of the twelve writers who initially signed the letter to the SED leadership in support of Biermann he was a central figure in the tense situation which prevailed in the late 1970's and suffered as a result. In June 1978, not long after Honecker was lashing out at "artists and writers who do not correctly understand the class character of SED policies" and was promising to combat vigorously "those ideas which contradict Scientific Socialism," Heym was excluded from all public events and prevented from publishing anything. He was also expelled from the SED for "serving the class enemy" and removed from the official Writers' Union.<sup>14</sup> Knowingly or not, the SED had substantiated Heym's concerns about the continued presence of Stalinism in the DDR by responding in a Stalinist manner.

Heym nonetheless carried on as a political critic into the 1980's. This persistence was exemplified by his

enthusiastic response to the birth of autonomous peace activism in the DDR and by a statement made on January 14, 1982. In the latter he openly took issue with the SED's line on the Polish Crisis.<sup>15</sup>

In the field of east German critical theory one person has clearly stood above all the others. Rudolph Bahro earned this distinction by virtue of his acclaimed theoretical work The Alternative in Eastern Europe and as a result of his other analytical statements concerning the nature of Soviet bloc societies and the process required to transform them in a socialist direction.

Bahro's appearance on the East German dissident scene came relatively late and did not last very long. Yet another SED member, he joined the Party as a teenager in 1952. By 1965 he had risen within it to become the deputy editor of the official SED student journal. Bahro then went on to serve for years as a valued member of the technical intelligentsia.

Whereas the crises of 1953 and 1956 marked turning points for Havemann, Biermann and Heym it was the 1968 East bloc crisis over Czechoslovakia which turned Bahro into an oppositionist. Indeed, as he indicated repeatedly in the late 1970's, the Prague Spring experience fundamentally affected his views on Socialism and what was necessary to realize it. Accordingly, Bahro's worldview was profoundly shaken by the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968. Bahro reacted against the intervention believing it has the counter-

revolutionary effect of diminishing the number of people who believed in the possibility of socialist renewal.<sup>16</sup>

From that point onwards Bahro was a determined foe of the East German ruling elite. However, he kept his opposition to it to himself at first. In fact, Bahro took the unique course of embarking on several years of theoretical study which culminated in his book.

Once The Alternative was completed Bahro logically chose to turn to West German sources for its publication. This decision was something the SED leadership would seize on and which directly influenced the enactment of the 1979 law aimed at those who had their works published in West Germany. The political ante was raised even higher when Bahro agreed to an August 23, 1977 West German television interview concerning his book as a means to get his ideas across to people on both sides of the border dividing Germany.

Immediately after its broadcast the East German Peoples' Police went into action. On August 24th Bahro was hit with espionage charges. The following day Neues Deutschland reported on the incident noting that the security forces of the DDR had arrested another spy for West German intelligence.

The victimization of Bahro gave the DDR's international image another black eye. European leftists and Amnesty International responded with campaigns in his defence. The Eurocommunists rallied to his support with Spain's Santiago

Carillo going so far as to call for Bahro's release on West German television thereby conveying the message into the DDR.<sup>17</sup> The far-reaching protests had some effect. Bahro was sentenced to eight years in prison but released after about a year. He ended up in West Germany where he went on to become a prominent member of the West German Greens.

Despite all the furor the immediate impact of Bahro's ideas on the DDR seems to have been limited mainly to lower and middle levels of the SED. Accordingly, a report in Der Spiegel at the time claimed the book was being widely read by East Berlin SED officials and there was a statement by an anonymous East German apparatchik declaring, "Bahro's courage has earned him an honourable place in the history of the German workers' movement."<sup>18</sup> However, it would be several years before it would become apparent that their impact on East German dissent and critical thought was substantial.

Bahro's views as expressed in the 1970's were, in any event, quite important and very unique in many respects. Their significance rests not so much on their comprehensiveness as their being predicated on the experiences of what Bahro refers to as 'Actually Existing Socialism' in the Soviet sphere of influence and of the experience in Czechoslovakia in 1968 in particular.

Proceeding with the same outlook and the same objective which Marx had in mind when he studied capitalism Bahro critiques Actually Existing Socialism as another system of

oppression and exploitation which is so far removed from Communism that another revolution is necessary to set it on the road again. Bahro went as far as to state with respect to the political apparatus that, "Ours is a state-machine the likes of which Marx and Engels wanted the proletarian revolution to smash."<sup>19</sup>

In making this assertion Bahro maintains that the heart of the matter lies with the Party. He simultaneously viewed it as both the prevalent obstacle to progress towards Communism and as the place within the system of Actually Existing Socialism where the problem of revolutionary potential is bound up. Proof of these things were to be found both within the SED and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during 1968 especially given the role the latter played in the Prague Spring experience.

Bahro thus viewed the ruling SED as the concentrated expression of the fact that the momentum of the October Revolution had expired and that we have reached a point on the non-capitalist road of industrialization where we can no longer advance qualitatively.<sup>20</sup> To this conclusion can be counterposed his glowing account of the Czech Party in 1968. He portrayed it as the sparkplug of a liberatory process maintaining,

As soon as the Czech Communist Party dropped the first slight hint that it was about to resume the original emancipatory role of the Communist Party, every compass needle of hope in society at once began to swing round and point towards it.<sup>21</sup>

Bahro, in effect, sought a process where the Party's

stifling grip over East bloc societies would be broken and in which a wholesale regeneration of the ruling party would begin giving the movement towards Socialism a rush of new momentum. In his words, such a development would "create the communist movement afresh" and initiate a "Cultural Revolution" which would undertake the key task in a revolutionary social transformation, the supercession of the division of labour.<sup>2</sup> This meant the movement's goal would once again be to realize Marx's concept of a free association of producers.

Furthermore, Bahro was convinced that the forces which would be the motor force of this Cultural Revolution were alive and active within the system he was critiquing. Bahro made this clear in his August 23, 1977 interview in which he stated,

In the countries of Actually Existing Socialism, there is a vast amount of what I term 'surplus consciousness' - psychological energy and capacities which are no longer directly linked to the daily work-process and the normal working of the apparatus. This means there are strong emancipatory forces at work which are not organized and cannot therefore be used.

To this Bahro adds,

We must practically attempt to replace bourgeois civilization whose horizon we have not been able to overcome, with an alternative, another type of civilization.<sup>23</sup>

The task of making this Cultural Revolution leading to a new civilization would belong to a movement of communist opposition formed into a 'League of Communists.' This organization would have to be formed across the East bloc



and achieve ideological hegemony within it. Accordingly, Bahro cautions against any actions which would jeopardize the DDR's stability and points his strategic perspective towards Moscow. He states, "The case has to be won in Moscow. After the Czech experience we have to aim at change coming from there."<sup>24</sup> Shades of Harich. Once again an SED dissident was banking on change within the DDR emanating from the USSR.

In a somewhat similar vein Bahro never called into question the system of rule by a one party state. He felt each East European society should find pluralistic expression within one Communist Party which in turn would engage in a dialogue with the whole of society. In adopting this position Bahro sets himself clearly apart from the Eurocommunist acceptance of a broader form of political pluralism.

Nonetheless, Bahro saw Eurocommunism as a positive phenomenon in the West. He believed it would act as a stimulus for real reform in the East and as an obstacle to a repetition of actions like the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>25</sup> Their political differences notwithstanding, this view alone explains how it was possible for members of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 civil rights movement to issue a statement in solidarity with Bahro on July 22, 1978.

Christa Wolf distinguished herself as the foremost female critic of the East German government in the 1960's and 1970's. Partly due to this she achieved a sort of un-

declared status as the DDR's foremost feminist. Wolf is also one of the SED's communist critics. She joined the Party in 1949 and was briefly a candidate member of the Central Committee in the 1960's.

As a literary figure many of her conflicts with the DDR's political and cultural establishment naturally coincided with Wolf Biermann's. This was especially true in December 1965 when she too faced the wrath of Erich Honecker concerning cultural trends in the DDR. Christa Wolf's 'errors' were to desire art which would raise questions "which the artist thinks he or she sees, even if he or she does not see how they can be solved" and to stress the importance of the subjective in the creative process.<sup>26</sup> And as noted, her public protest against the forced emigration of Biermann brought her expulsion from the Party and the Writers' Federation.

It is small wonder then that Christa Wolf shared Stefan Heym's concern about the residue of Stalinism in the DDR. In her book A Model Childhood she addresses this problem by telling East Germans to come to terms with their history and cease pretending that parts of it do not exist. "What is past is not dead; it is not even past. We cut ourselves off from it; we pretend to be strangers."<sup>27</sup> By issuing such a challenge Christa Wolf was calling upon the DDR to remove the skeletons from its closet with everything that such action would entail.

By the 1980's she was giving voice to her feminist

side. Although she is well aware of how substantial strides have been made in East Germany towards realizing social equality between the sexes and of how women in the DDR have the same opportunities as men Christa Wolf remained unsatisfied. She did not believe the real aspirations of East German women had been fully realized. Wolf made this clear in her reaction to the feminist currents which appeared in conjunction with the rise of the autonomous peace movement. She thus said, "For the first time women are demonstrating their 'otherness' and that they may wonder why they should assume roles which have done men such harm over the centuries."<sup>28</sup>

Thoughts like these set her apart from Havemann and Heym but not Bahro who in his critique of 'Actually Existing Socialism' argued that in the societies with this system the process of women's emancipation had stagnated. Bahro went on to outline measures he believed were necessary to overcome the sexual division of labour in society.<sup>29</sup>

Poet Reiner Kunze also carved out a unique place for himself within the DDR's dissident milieu of this period. Kunze was different from the outset. Unlike those mentioned above he was not directly linked to the SED nor is there any indication that he shared these critics' initial approval of the DDR's system. The course of Kunze's political problems was rather different as well. In fact, he first clashed with authority in the DDR in a small way while working as a teaching assistant in Leipzig. Kunze got in trouble simply because he wrote poetry.<sup>30</sup>

As time went on and he continued with his writing Kunze inevitably came up against official censorship. He responded to these experiences by expressing his frustration through his works. Kunze later got into deep trouble for having a collection of his poems published in West Germany. This action led SED cultural spokesperson Max Schulz to attack him as a traitor at the Sixth Writers' Federation Congress in May 1969.<sup>31</sup>

Reiner Kunze's conflict with the Party peaked in the mid-1970's. In 1976 he had his short volume The Wonderful Years published in West Germany. The book, which reflected on the impact of East German life and the DDR's educational system on the young, drew on the experiences of his daughter and focused its criticism on what Kunze saw as the remnants of the Prussian Spirit in East Germany. The work earned this 'critical individualist' the treatment accorded an 'Enemy of the State.' Kunze and his family were subjected to a systematic campaign of intimidation and harassment. It lasted until the authorities offered them an exit visa to leave the DDR which was accepted. Among the few who raised their voices in protest against the State's actions were Wolf Biermann and another critical writer, Jurek Becker.<sup>32</sup>

Aside from the official attacks on Kunze what made him so important was that portions of his sarcastically titled collection The Wonderful Years constituted an anti-militarist critique of a social order ostensibly dedicated to eradicating militarism and achieving peace. The follow-

ing two passages exemplify this relatively early expression of opposition to militarism in the DDR.

#### Six-Year-Old

He is piercing tin soldiers with pins. He drives the pins into their stomachs until their points come out at the back. He drives pins into their backs until they come out of their chests. They fall.  
 "And why are you doing it to these tin soldiers?"  
 "Don't you see? They're not ours."

#### Eleven-Year-Old

"I've been elected into the Group Council", says the boy as he thrusts his fork into pieces of ham. The man who ordered the meal for him is silent. "I am responsible for Socialist Defence Training", says the boy.  
 "For what?"  
 "Socialist Defence Training." He is sucking macaroni from his lower lip.  
 "And what do you have to do?"  
 "I prepare maneuvers and so on."<sup>33</sup>

By looking at the experiences and views of Robert Havemann, Wolf Biermann and Rudolph Bahro and, to a lesser extent, those of Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf and Reiner Kunze one can only sense the profound significance of the 1968 Czech experience for the development of dissent and critical thought in the DDR. In particular, it is apparent that the fate of these critics and their aspirations were directly related to the fate of Dubcek's experiment in Prague. This was so because the fate of his experiment decisively effected the short term prospects for realizing an East bloc society invigorated by broad intellectual freedom and wide open public debate.

It was equally true that the fate of Ulbricht's neo-Stalinist rule was at stake in Czechoslovakia. This fact

underscored the intense hostility of the SED leadership towards Dubcek's Prague Spring. In one respect the SED hierarchy saw Dubcek as a threat because the liberalization he initiated coincided with Bonn's Ostpolitik. Together they raised the spectre of Prague following the example set by Bucharest when Romania established formal diplomatic relations with Bonn in defiance of the state interests of the DDR.<sup>34</sup> In another respect Dubcek was a threat because the survival of his experiment could only encourage support for a similar course in the DDR especially in view of the access East Germans had to information concerning Czechoslovakia from West German television and from the holidays many of them take each year in that country.

Ulbricht's acute sensitivity to the risks to his power inherent in the Prague Spring was demonstrated on July 23, 1968. On that day, just as the official Soviet newspaper Isvestia announced an extension of Red Army maneuvers along the USSR's western frontier, Ulbricht had a barbed wire fence erected on the frontier separating the DDR from Czechoslovakia.<sup>35</sup> Ulbricht's determination to see Dubcek's experiment halted was further demonstrated by the presence of the East German National People's Army (NVA) in the invasion force.

The Warsaw Pact intervention was as welcome to Ulbricht as the invasion of Hungary had been in 1956. It brought social and economic experimentation throughout the East bloc to a temporary halt. It was also followed by a seemingly

reassuring tightening of Moscow's control over the foreign policies of all of the member states of the Warsaw Pact with the notable exception of Romania. A more self-confident Walter Ulbricht could similarly see how his political value to Moscow rose much as it had in 1953 and 1956. In addition, now that Czechoslovakia was more politically suspect, its role in the 'Socialist Camp' would be more circumscribed while the DDR's would be expanded as a result.

Protests against the invasion within the DDR were minor and confined to small groups of rebellious East German youths.<sup>36</sup> In a broader sense, the invasion crushed popular hopes for greater cultural freedom and political change. Many East Germans who were disillusioned by the abrupt termination of the Prague Spring experiment retreated into their private lives just as so many would in Czechoslovakia. In view of these responses it is not surprising that the first half of the 1970's was marked by a distinct lack of dissident or independent political activity in the DDR.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Editors, "Robert Havemann Calls for International Pressure Against the Imprisonment of Bahro", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 2 No. 4, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Heinz Lippmann, "The Limits of Reform Communism", Problems of Communism, Vol. XIX No. 3, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Carola Stern, Ulbricht (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), p. 100.

<sup>4</sup>Roger Woods, "The Significance of the East German Intellectuals in Opposition" Roger Woods, ed., Honecker's Germany (Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>Editors, "Havemann Appeal on Eve of the 30th Anniversary of GDR", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 3 No. 4, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Havemann, "Freedom As Necessity", Roger Woods, ed., Opposition in the GDR Under Honecker 1971-85 (MacMillan Pub., 1985), p. 165.

<sup>7</sup>T.L., "Culture: Wolf Biermann", Meta, Vol. 1 Nos. 3-4, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>9</sup>David Childs, The GDR: Moscow's German Ally (Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 223.

<sup>10</sup>Werner Volkmer, "East Germany: Dissenting Views During the Last Decade", Rudolph L. Tokes, ed., Opposition in Eastern Europe (MacMillan Press, 1979), p. 124.

<sup>11</sup>Micheal J. Sodaro, "Limits to Dissent in the GDR: Fragmentation, Co-optation and Repression", Jane Leftwich Curry, ed., Dissent in Eastern Europe (Praeger Publishers, 1983), p. 91.

<sup>12</sup>David Childs, Op. Cit., p. 227.

<sup>13</sup>Werner Volkmer, Op. Cit., p. 124.

<sup>14</sup>Norman M. Naimark, "Is It True What They're Saying About East Germany?", Orbis, Vol. 23, Fall 1979, p. 577.

<sup>15</sup>Stefan Heym, "Statement on Poland (14.1.82)", Roger Woods, ed., Opposition in the GDR Under Honecker 1971-85 (MacMillan Press, 1986), p. 139.



<sup>16</sup>Editors, "Rudolph Bahro's Views on Eastern Europe", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 3 No. 5, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "Carillo Calls for Bahro's Release", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 2 No. 1, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>TIME Correspondent, "Exile for Heretics", TIME, October 3, 1979, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup>Rudolph Bahro, "A Critique of Socialism as it Actually Exists", Roger Woods, ed., Opposition in the GDR Under Honecker 1971-85 (MacMillan Press, 1986), p. 142.

<sup>20</sup>Editors, "The Talk that Led to a Spy Charge", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe Vol. 1 No. 5, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Rudolph Bahro, Op. Cit., p. 145.

<sup>22</sup>Editors, "The Talk that Led to a Spy Charge", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 1 No. 5, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Editors, "An Interview with Rudolph Bahro", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 2 No. 4, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>25</sup>Melvin Croan, "Eurocommunism and East Germany", Vernon V. Aspaturian, Jiri Valenta and David P. Burke, ed. Eurocommunism Between East and West (Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 148.

<sup>26</sup>Harmut Zimmermann, "The GDR in the 1970's", Problems of Communism, Vol. XXVII No. 2, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup>Norman M. Naimark, "Writing the GDR's History" Problems of Communism, Vol. XXXII No. 4, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup>Roger Woods, Op. Cit., p. 93.

<sup>29</sup>Rudolph Bahro, The Alternative in Eastern Europe (Verso Editions, 1984), p. 446.

<sup>30</sup>Martin Esslin, "Reiner Kunze, a Poet from 'Prussia'", Encounter, July 1978, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup>David Childs, Op. Cit., p. 218.

<sup>32</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "Letter on the Current Situation in the GDR", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 2 No. 6, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup>Martin Esslin, Op. Cit., p. 21.

<sup>34</sup>Angela E. Stent, "Soviet Policy Toward the German Democratic Republic", Sarah M. Terry, ed., Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe (Yale University Press, 1984), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup>Micheal Solomon, Prague Notebook (Little, Brown & Co., 1971), p. 141.

<sup>36</sup>Wolfgang Mieczkowski, "In Search of the Forbidden Nation: Opposition by the Younger Generation in the GDR", Government and Opposition February 1983, p. 183.

## CHAPTER V

## THE IMPACT OF THE POLISH CRISIS AND SOLIDARNOSC

The Polish Crisis of the 1980's would have a far less discernible impact on the development of dissent and critical thought in the DDR than the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 did. Still, the repercussions of the Polish Crisis were significant and merit attention. The public reactions of the East German authorities and the documented reactions of ordinary East Germans including members of the working class in particular make this clear.

Animosity towards and expressions of fear concerning manifestations of social unrest and political change in Poland have been recurrent phenomena within the SED hierarchy since 1956. As noted earlier, the Poznan uprising inspired both alarm and hardened resistance to reform from within the SED leadership while Gomulka's ascent to power in October 1956 was clearly understood as an immediate threat to Ulbricht's continued rule in the DDR. Similar responses were forthcoming in the wake of the mass strikes by Polish workers during the winter of 1970-71. These caused Gomulka's downfall. The SED leaders interpreted the latter events as a warning which meant there could be no weakening of Party control and no relaxation in efforts to raise living standards, particularly those of industrial workers.<sup>1</sup> The unrest similarly made East Germany's rulers more reluctant to engage in economic experiments even if this meant reduced rates of economic growth.<sup>2</sup>

In one respect the SED leaders have been consistent. They have guided their responses to events in Poland with an eye toward securing political stability in that country. This desire underlay their benevolence under the newly assumed leadership of Erich Honecker immediately after the 1970-71 worker unrest subsided. Specifically, East Germany's leaders gave ordinary Poles ready access to the DDR where they could take advantage of its relatively abundant supply of consumer goods. Polish consumers seized on this generosity to such an extent that their purchases caused shortages in the DDR and led to an East German policy reversal amidst widespread popular complaints. Soon afterwards official East German benevolence was replaced by a posture of quietly expressed fear and belligerence as Poland sank into renewed crisis. Consequently, in the wake of the June 1976 Polish strikes and the subsequent flowering of unofficial political activity, the SED began to apply discreet pressure on the Polish Party to take a tougher stance towards dissent.<sup>3</sup>

The SED adopted a somewhat different posture during the historic Polish strikes in the summer of 1980. It was one of uncertainty and even bewilderment because Honecker and his Party apparently did not know quite how to react. This uncertainty was reflected in the East German media which remained practically silent about the events just across the border which were holding the attention of the world. Indeed, this official silence was pathetic and absurd since

most East Germans could see what was taking place courtesy of West German television.

The Party did not fully articulate its interpretation of what was happening in Poland until October 14, 1980. This was several weeks after the Gdansk Agreements were signed and more than a week after Solidarnosc was legally registered as an independent trade union organization. The SED's 'line' was laid down by Erich Honecker in a speech in Gera. Predictably, his position was tough and fully consistent with the official Soviet view which contained warnings about 'counter-revolution' in Poland and the activities of 'anti-socialist forces financed from abroad'. The SED leader also issued a stern warning. He stated, "Poland is and remains a socialist country. We, together with our friends, will make sure of that."<sup>4</sup>

The actions of the East German government during this time revealed the obvious nervousness of its leaders in the face of the emergence of Solidarnosc. Whereas Ulbricht had waited until a month before the Warsaw Pact's tanks entered Prague to put up a barbed wire fence at the border with Czechoslovakia, Honecker showed little hesitation in taking similar action. Access to and from Poland was severely restricted beginning in the autumn of 1980. Furthermore, he did not confine his efforts to the border with Poland. Contacts with West Germany were also frustrated. In particular, the minimum currency exchange required of West German visitors to the DDR was suddenly doubled. The DDR even

unsuccessfully demanded full recognition of DDR citizenship by the government in Bonn as a way to limit contacts between citizens of the two Germanies.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing bewilderment co-existed with this growing fortress mentality. For example, even as the Polish crisis resulted in economic dislocations in the DDR, the East German government extended new measures to aid the Polish economy and often stated its desire to see Poland sort out its own problems. Meanwhile, in the same time period, there were still more expressions of belligerence.

This hostility reached a peak at a December 5, 1980 emergency meeting of the Warsaw Pact in Moscow where only representatives of the Czechoslovak government were as rabid in their posture as the DDR's Minister of the Interior, Erich Mielke. He unleashed a scathing attack on Solidarnosc and the independent press in Poland and left no doubt about the DDR government's desire for a crackdown.<sup>6</sup>

Motivated by official fear, news coverage in the East German media became increasingly hysterical during 1981. In February 1981, for example, DDR radio claimed the leaders of Solidarnosc were deliberately provoking chaos and anarchy every day in Poland. On another occasion, it went so far as to allege that Solidarnosc leaders Zbigniew Bujak and Jan Rulewski had Nazi leanings.

Jaruzelski's imposition of Martial Law on December 13, 1981 was considered most welcome. East German approval of his crackdown was further demonstrated in August 1983 when

Erich Honecker became the first Warsaw Pact head of state to visit Poland since the summer of 1980. But despite such a public expression of approval the leaders of the SED continued to feel uneasy about the situation and particularly about Solidarnosc's survival as an underground organization. Consequently, as late as 1985, they let it be known to their Polish counterparts that the Polish Party should move to weaken the position of the Catholic Church in Poland and clamp down on the opposition.<sup>7</sup>

One can better understand the seemingly contradictory and less than consistent course of East German policy towards developments in Poland and the Polish Party's handling of them if one takes the situation of the DDR's workforce into account and recognizes that many East Germans felt considerable sympathy with the resistance movement in Poland.

The June 1953 insurrection proved beyond any doubt that the DDR's workers are neither inherently passive or obedient. Their silence after June 1953 was an involuntary silence which the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution reinforced. The DDR's subsequent economic achievements after August 13, 1961 and their positive impact on workers' living standards have made their lives easier since. But this East German 'economic miracle' did not spell the end of hardships for many of the DDR's workers nor did it do anything to alleviate their political powerlessness in relation to the SED-dominated state.

To this day the needs of East German workers remain effectively subordinate to those of the State. This is in spite of official claims that real economic co-determination exists in the DDR. In fact the prevailing relationship between the workers and the State which administers virtually the entire East German economy is still remarkably similar to the relationship between Labour and Capital in the West. The simple fact that East German workers find themselves having to work long hours often in disorienting multiple shifts amply testifies to their wholly subordinate position in the production process. So does the fact that they endure this kind of hardship as a result of the State's drive for export-oriented production.<sup>8</sup>

The situation of East German workers is made considerably worse by their lack of authentic self-organization. The only organizations available to them are the democratic centralist, Party-dominated member unions of the Free German Labour Union (FDGB). These are so thoroughly integrated into the state apparatus that the head of the FDGB is normally a member of the SED Politbureau. East German workers acutely realize that they cannot legally work to replace these unions or transform them into truly representative bodies such as the Czechoslovak unions briefly became in the latter half of 1968. Consequently, few East German workers take the FDGB unions, to which almost all of them belong, seriously.<sup>9</sup>

Two examples of worker dissent during the period of



Polish Solidarnosc's legal existence exemplify the true relationship of the DDR's workers to the FDGB trade unions. One involved a warehouse worker in Jena named Roland Jahn who went on to become a leading activist in the autonomous peace movement. In an interview following his later expulsion to the West, Jahn recounted how,

I was supposed to become the union shop steward at work because I always stood up for the rights of my fellow workers, but the State intervened and I was not allowed to be elected to the post. I then resigned from the union and was immediately accused of wishing to form an independent union.<sup>10</sup>

The other incident involved a September 1980 strike by over 350 East German railworkers in West Berlin. Members of the FDGB, these workers were angry at being paid one third less than West German railworkers. They also complained that because of staff shortages they had to work between 100 and 120 hours of overtime a month. During their strike they occupied railway signal towers only to be forcefully dislodged by East German rail police who were armed with axes and crowbars and who, in some cases, were accompanied by police dogs. The East German Railways administration had refused to enter into negotiations with the strikers. What support they got came from individual donations and collections at other workshops but not from the FDGB.

In an interview following the job action one of the strikers made it clear that he was well aware of the successful strikes and workplace occupations which had just ended in Poland. Indeed, he envied the support the shipyard

workers in Gdansk had received.<sup>11</sup>

Although it is true that many East Germans, including workers, resented the negative impact of the Polish Crisis on the performance of the DDR's economy and the economic assistance extended to Poland, many others held entirely different views. Reports of strikes in mid-1981 and of clashes between police and young demonstrators who supported Solidarnosc clearly testified to this.<sup>12</sup>

Roland Jahn provides more evidence. He recalled how discussions took place among his workmates in the industrial centre of Jena where these workers favourably contrasted Solidarnosc with the FDGB. In a more general sense he also noted that,

Most people were sympathetic but expressed themselves in different ways. Some happily at home watching it all on TV, some would come forward at their own workplace much more confidently. That of course brought problems with it.<sup>13</sup>

These examples definitely indicated the existence of at least broad moral support for Solidarnosc. Consequently, it is no wonder the DDR's ruling elite wanted to see the situation in Poland 'normalized'. Likewise, it was logical in June 1982, once it was apparent Martial Law had only weakened Solidarnosc and forced it underground, for the DDR's Council of State to show continued official insecurity by calling on elected Party organizations to be more responsive to their constituents. The Council of State also repeated an earlier call by Honecker for better public relations work by these bodies.<sup>14</sup>

All told it is clear that the Polish Crisis of the 1980's served to heighten the constant sense of insecurity prevalent within the SED hierarchy. The crisis also attested once again to the dilemma posed for the DDR's leaders by the daily presence of West German television programming in the homes of millions of East Germans. Due to the accessibility of information from this source official efforts to blacken the independent Polish workers' movement did little to diminish the appeal it definitely had for many East German workers. Workers in the DDR could plainly see how their Polish counterparts had successfully realized forms of authentic worker self-organization of a kind which had not existed in East Germany since the brief appearance of autonomous factory assemblies during the June 1953 insurrection.

Overall, the Polish Crisis and the struggles of Poland's workers were unique with respect to the development of dissent and critical thought in the DDR. They had a definite impact on the DDR's ruling circles and, to a lesser extent, within East German civil society. Yet these effects did not directly alter the basic development of independent political activity in the DDR. Instead, issues and concerns arose to take precedence which were not directly linked to the workplace. To a certain extent, these issues even placed their protagonists at odds with the very nature of modern industrial society. Furthermore, the emergence of activism focused on them revealed that developments in Western Europe

and, especially in West Germany, would exert much more of an influence on East German dissent and critical thought than events taking place in Poland.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Childs, The GDR: Moscow's German Ally (Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Hartmut Zimmermann, "The GDR in the 1970's", Problems of Communism, Vol. XXVII No. 2, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Editors, "Gierek on the Opposition", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 1 No. 5, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>Kevin Ruane, The Polish Challenge (BBC Publications, 1982), p. 64.

<sup>5</sup>Angela Stent, "A Quest for Legitimacy", Problems of Communism, Vol. XXXV No 2, p. 84.

<sup>6</sup>Neal Ascherson, The Polish August (Penguin Books, 1981), p. 215.

<sup>7</sup>Oliver MacDonald, "Jaruzelski Back on the Defensive", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 1, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup>Norman M. Naimark, "Is It True What They're Saying About East Germany?", Orbis, Vol. 23, Fall 1979, p. 560.

<sup>9</sup>David Childs, Op. Cit., p. 158.

<sup>10</sup>Editors, "Unilateralism in the East", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 7 No. 1, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Micheal Stone, "Another Poland in East Germany?" New Statesman, Sept. 26, 1980, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Roger Woods, Opposition in the GDR Under Honecker 1971-85, (MacMillan Press, 1986), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>Editors, "Unilateralism in the East", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 7 No. 1, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>Roger Woods, Op. Cit., p. 15.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE AUTONOMOUS PEACE MOVEMENT

In East Germany today the clerics are now talking like revolutionaries while the functionaries are talking like priests. - Stefan Heym in 1982<sub>1</sub>

Militarism has always been unpopular with large numbers of young people in the DDR. This was clear in 1952 when a purge swept Eric Honecker's Free German Youth (FDJ) organizations after they managed to recruit only one third of the expected quota of 'volunteers' for the DDR's para-military forces. This distaste for the military was just as apparent following the formation of the National People's Army (NVA) in 1956 and the introduction of conscription six years later without any provisions for conscientious objection. Such provisions were officially deemed unnecessary because, according to the SED, the DDR was by its very nature a 'Peace State'.<sup>2</sup>

Conscription was a response to the NVA's lack of success in recruiting volunteers. It was also a policy which could not have been put into effect until after the erection of The Wall due to the SED's fear of accelerating the emigration of East German youth to the West and even then the introduction of conscription was accompanied by legal measures imposing a possible three year prison term for non-compliance.

Yet despite this some 3000 young East German men refused to be conscripted during the first year this law was in force. What was truly astonishing, however, was the fact

that less than a dozen of these draft resisters actually went to prison. The SED also feared the potential repercussions of the East German 'Peace State' jailing thousands of youths for refusing to bear arms.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of conscription was very significant in two other respects as well. In one respect it marked a decisive turning point in the process of the militarization of a society which, in its infancy, had loudly proclaimed its opposition to militarism consistent with its 'anti-fascist character'. In another, the initiation of conscription served as a catalyst for the development of an anti-militarist movement in the DDR. This would make issues related to peace principal focal points for the expression of dissent and critical thought.

Conscription was met by opposition from two distinct but by no means mutually exclusive sources. One of these was youth as the number of resisters during the first year of conscription demonstrated. The other was the East German religious community. This Christian opposition was expressed through the East German Protestant Church in particular.

The East German Lutheran Church exemplified such opposition early on by asserting that conscription amounted to a violation of the East German Constitution's guarantees of freedom of belief. Furthermore, in 1963, the Church issued a document entitled 'Ten Articles Concerning Peace and the Service of the Church' in which it saw itself as

obliged to provide legal protection for conscientious objectors.<sup>4</sup>

The Churches began to apply sustained political pressure on the SED to change its conscription policy. This pressure combined with clear evidence of substantial youth opposition to forced military service yielded tangible results. On September 7, 1964 the DDR's conscription law was amended not to fulfill the real goal of the Church, a civilian alternative to military service, but to allow for the existence of construction brigades in the NVA.

These military units were called 'Bausoldaten' and those who opted to be in them did not have to bear arms. However, these construction soldiers remained subject to military discipline and military law. Furthermore, if one chose to join the Bausoldaten one still faced punitive measures. Members of these units were and still are stigmatized. It is common for them to be denied access to higher education and other career opportunities.

Initially the number of conscripts who took advantage of this alternative form of military service was small. In part this was because many young East Germans did not know the Bausoldaten option existed. The government did nothing to publicize its existence. Nonetheless, word spread and during the 1970's the number of unarmed construction soldiers in the NVA steadily increased.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, East German society was subjected to a process of increasing militarization. A great deal of this



was focused on the young. In this same period religious opposition to East German militarism continued and the political significance of the Bausoldaten grew.

The FDJ was instrumental to the process of militarizing East German society. Utilizing it as well as the Young Pioneers and the East German Red Cross, the State expanded pre- and para-military training programs for the young in the mid-1960's. This entailed the inculcation of values designed to create a positive identification with the NVA and the USSR. In the latter half of the decade efforts to generate enthusiasm among the young for the military were stepped up as the FDJ formed 'Recruitment Collectives' which were sent into the DDR's elite senior high schools. However, these efforts were less than successful.

In 1973 these activities were extended into the general polytechnical schools. But this measure provoked widespread parental and parish opposition. Later, at the start of June 1978, DDR Education Minister Margot Honecker announced a new plan to introduce military education into the ninth and tenth grade curriculum. This would affect 15 and 16 year olds. The plan was put into effect on September 1, 1978. There was no advance consultation with representatives of the DDR's churches even though Erich Honecker and Bishop Schönherr had reached their historic accord only six months earlier and despite long-standing concerns by the Church with respect to such matters.<sup>6</sup> Partly due to this Margot Honecker's introduction of 'Defence Studies' would evoke far

greater protest than the introduction of conscription had in 1962.

Three developments would serve to highlight how opposition by the Federation of Evangelical Churches or Kirchenbund to the increasing militarization of East German society was continuing. One was a declaration by the church leadership at a 1965 Kirchenbund conference in which it evaluated conscientious objection as a Christian witness for peace and non-violence. The church leaders declared that in a world dominated by the nuclear threat conscientious objection out of a Christian witness to peace should have priority over military service. The State demanded a withdrawal of this declaration. The leaders refused but would modify their stand a year later to indicate that they were not making a judgement either for or against military service as such.<sup>7</sup>

Another initiative came in 1971. The Kirchenbund responded to the FDJ's work in the schools in support of the NVA with concrete measures of its own. In particular, it floated a proposal for a mandatory peace education course for the grade schools and then proceeded to found the Church Office for Peace Research which became known as the Study Group for Peace Questions. The task of its members would be to, among other things, convey the results of scientific peace research to ecumenical groups.

A third initiative was still more provocative. The Protestant Church facilitated the organization of regular

meetings of former and future military resisters.<sup>8</sup> These events in combination with the forging of personal bonds between members of the Bausoldaten were highly significant. They proved to be catalysts for the emergence of the autonomous peace movement of the 1980's. In fact, the participants in these phenomena made up what amounted to the autonomous peace movement in the DDR in its embryonic stage.

Both observers and the East German activists themselves seem to agree on one very important point. Namely, the single most important stimulus for the emergence of the autonomous peace movement in the DDR as the most significant manifestation of social resistance there since June 1953 and the most durable to date, was the introduction of Defense Studies in the schools by the DDR's Education Minister Margot Honecker in 1978.

The move, which effectively made military preparedness a subject in its own right, immediately provoked major protests. Both members of the clergy and many parents objected that military education for school children would contribute to an atmosphere of anxiety, foster a hatred of the 'enemy', contradictory to Christian teachings, and instill the belief that military action was an acceptable behavioral norm for conflict resolution. In particular, the Church sent a letter to all of its parishioners stating its strong opposition. Furthermore, even before the actual introduction of the Defense Studies Decree it had declared its willingness to support those parents and guardians whose

conscience would not allow them to have their children receive this kind of instruction. The Church also countered the State's move by setting up a number of loosely coordinated Peace Education initiatives at parish and regional levels.<sup>9</sup>

The SED was not impressed by the opposition to the decree. It held to the view that military instruction and the credibility of its peace policies went hand in hand. It further maintained that the stability of the DDR and its readiness to defend itself was a contribution to preserving and securing peace in Central Europe.<sup>10</sup>

The impact of the immediate reactions to the Defense Studies Decree was accentuated by other developments at the end of the 1970's. All of these helped to facilitate the rise of autonomous peace activism because they made growing numbers of East Germans feel more threatened by the arms race than ever before and more motivated to do something on their own in response. Thus, the militarization of the school curricula roughly coincided with the extension of civil defense exercises in many cities across the DDR and the threat posed to Europe by the approaching Euromissile deployments. The former practice included the staging of blackouts and siren testing. This was also the approximate time period in which the West European peace movement began its meteoric rise making a strong impression on many East Germans, especially the young.

In addition, since 1977 there had been widening

contacts between the East German Kirchenbund and the Dutch Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV). The IKV upholds a unilateralist stand on the arms race. This is expressed in its 'self-disarmament model' which envisions the Netherlands setting an example for other nations by initiating unconditional disarmament measures.

This type of thinking consequently had an impact in the DDR. In November 1981 the Synod of Protestant Churches in Saxony passed a resolution calling for unilateral disarmament moves by the Warsaw Pact specifically reducing the number of Soviet tanks and SS-20 missiles.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, just a few months later, young East German peace activists could be heard asking, "Shouldn't we begin with our own rockets?"<sup>12</sup>

In the 1980's the interaction between the Kirchenbund and the IKV was in large part centred around exchange visits during their respective 'Peace Weeks' or Friedensdekaden. In East Germany these Peace Weeks also coincided with Peace Weeks in the Federal Republic effectively giving them an all-German character.

The first took place in November 1980. It culminated a year in which internal discussions about peace assumed great importance within the Kirchenbund. The motto adopted for the week's events was 'Make Peace Without Weapons'. A special bookmarker bearing these words together with the words 'Swords to Ploughshares' and an accompanying emblem was produced to serve both as an invitation to the week's

events, as an aid to discussion and meditation and as a souvenir.<sup>13</sup>

The motto 'Make Peace Without Weapons' became a rallying cry for the autonomous peace movement. The 'Swords to Ploughshares' emblem became its symbol and a means by which those who supported it could identify each other. Both illustrated how the Church had, in the context of rising peace activism across Europe, served as a midwife for autonomous peace activism in the DDR. This, in turn, was a direct result of the unique degree of institutional independence the Church had secured for itself within East German society.

The 'Swords to Ploughshares' symbol also became the source of the first major confrontation between the Party, supported by the official DDR Peace Council and the FDJ, and the burgeoning autonomous peace movement. Literally, thousands of young East Germans had snapped up the cloth badges produced by the Church bearing this symbol. Despite the fact that the symbol replicated the USSR's memorial statue erected outside the UN building in New York City the State came to regard it as subversive. This was because the symbol came to be recognized as the visible trademark of an uncontrolled, implicitly political movement which in the words of peace activist Roland Jahn, "arose from the contradiction between the officially-proclaimed desire for peace and social reality, characterized by growing rearmament and the militarization of society."<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the East German 'Peace State' began to crack down on this widely expressed manifestation of indigenous pacifism. Part of the official attack was propagandistic. For example, Heinz Hoffmann, the commander of the NVA and the DDR's Defense Minister was suddenly heard proclaiming that, "East Germany needs both ploughshares and swords." Meanwhile the 1982 NVA recruiting campaign slogan turned out to be "Peace must be defended; peace must be armed."<sup>15</sup>

The State's repressive measures constituted a more serious problem. Many youths simply had the police or school authorities forcefully remove the patch from their clothing or belongings. Others were expelled from school or briefly jailed. Wearing the symbol in public was officially banned in March 1982. The authorities even went so far as to amend the law requiring official authorization for all printed materials to cover 'cloth emblems'.

The authorities hostility had an effect. In a move clearly designed to appease them the Church did an about face with regard to the symbol by calling on young East Germans to stop wearing it. This advice was not appreciated by many of the young peace activists and their displeasure showed a willingness to go further than the Church deemed prudent.

By this point in time four things had occurred which exemplified why the State had come to view the Swords to Ploughshares symbol as subversive. One involved the now

long-standing Church demand for a fully civilian alternative to conscription. Specifically, a campaign to realize this goal was launched in May 1981 by groups of youths in Dresden. It centred around a petition campaign directed at both the Church and the Volkskammer. In relatively little time the petition attracted the signatures of over 6000 young people. The exact demand was for the right to perform work in hospitals or other public health facilities. This option was already available in West Germany. The petitioners further contended that "those undertaking 'Social Service for Peace' should enjoy the same rights as those undertaking military service" and that, "those undertaking Social Service for Peace shall receive regular political instruction, with particular emphasis on: maintaining peace, disarmament and non-violent resolution of conflict."<sup>16</sup>

Christians in large numbers from across the DDR came out in support of the proposal made by the youth and urged the Church to lend its direct support. By late November 1981 all of the DDR's Evangelical regions had responded affirmatively by welcoming the initiative. Consequently, the issue of the civilian alternative to military service rose to become the primary focus of autonomous peace activity at the time and it remains a foremost priority to this day.

Being consistent, the SED was not favourably impressed by the depth of support for this demand either. The Party



responded by flatly rejecting it. Werner Walde, a candidate member of the Party's Politbureau, firmly set out the SED's position by rejecting the concept of social peace service as "anti-peace, anti-socialist and anti-constitutional." Walde further warned that those who pursued this demand risked the danger of confrontation with the state authorities.<sup>17</sup>

A second development highlighted the close relationship between the rising tide of autonomous peace activism and the aspirations of leading members of East Germany's critical intelligentsia who had risen to prominence during the 1960's and 1970's. It occurred December 13-14, 1981. The event was the SED-sanctioned Berlin Writers' Gathering held in the Grand Hall of the Hotel Stadt Berlin. The meeting unintentionally turned out to be a forum for political critics on both sides of the Berlin Wall.

The event was also referred to as 'The Berlin Meeting for the Promotion of Peace'. Yet the proceedings revealed a sharp split over the question of how exactly the cause of peace should be promoted. A majority of those present were unwavering adherents to the official East German line on such matters. But many of the others clearly were not. As a result, when the question of whether independent initiatives for peace in the DDR were worthy of support or not was broached the latter group clashed with those who upheld the SED's line.

Stefan Heym was present. He was predictably very outspoken in this regard. Among other things Heym called

for a joint demonstration by both East and West Germans against nuclear weapons. He proposed holding the event in East Berlin's Alexanderplatz and even suggested that Erich Honecker participate. Ever the heretic, Heym also took on the Party by openly condemning the planned Cruise and Pershing 2 missile deployments in Western Europe and the presence of Soviet SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe. Elsewhere, another critical writer from the DDR, Gunter de Buryn, spoke out in favour of the demand for a social peace service.<sup>18</sup>

Statements of this sort from the likes of Stefan Heym undoubtedly accentuated official East German anxiety over and suspicion towards the rapid spread of autonomous peace initiatives in the DDR. Regardless, just weeks later a more stunning example of continuity between the intellectual dissent of the 1960's and 1970's and the autonomous peace movement appeared. It took the form of a document entitled 'What Leads to Peace?'. The tract subsequently became commonly known as 'The Berlin Appeal'.

The Berlin Appeal effectively amounted to a manifesto for the autonomous peace movement. One of its two authors was none other than Robert Havemann. This was not surprising because the final two years of Havemann's life were marked by work focused on what he correctly recognized as a growing German peace movement active both in the Federal Republic and in the DDR. Havemann, who had been a founder of the official DDR Peace Council, was accordingly pleased

to see the new peace activism in East Germany. He felt, "a free peace movement in the DDR will provide a strong international impulse to help the forces of peace to victory and save us all from annihilation."<sup>19</sup>

The other author of the Berlin Appeal was a defiant young Protestant Pastor and a former member of the Bausoldaten, Rainer Epplemann. Pastor Epplemann had clearly placed himself at the forefront of the autonomous peace movement by the time of the release of the Berlin Appeal on January 25, 1982. He did this by staging 'Blues Services' in his East Berlin church. These happenings were, according to Havemann, instrumental to the growth of the autonomous peace movement. They were as much cultural events with anti-militarist political overtones as they were religious services. The State branded them 'political cabarets.'

In any event Rainer Epplemann's Blues Services were immensely popular with young East Germans including many who were not even religious. At times the turnout was so large the crowds had to be accommodated in as many as four shifts. This popularity was in large part a direct result of their offering 'space' where the young people in attendance could openly express without fear their desire for peace and opposition to militarism.

Epplemann also extended his work for peace into his more conventional services. At these garbage cans were placed before the altar. This enabled his parishioners to dump their children's war toys "where they belong."<sup>20</sup>

Whereas Havemann evoked the wrath of the State for his political defiance, Rainer Epplemann managed to provoke both the hostility of the State and the disdain of the Church hierarchy. The latter considered him politically provocative and was at pains to distance itself from Epplemann. Recognizing this, the SED tried without success to get the Church hierarchy to stifle him. Subsequently, in February 1982, the State took action on its own by arresting Epplemann for allegedly 'de-dignifying public authorities.'

The SED leadership showed just how seriously it took the defiant pastor when Erich Honecker sent telegrams to other leading DDR officials informing them of the arrest before they learned of it from non-official sources meaning West German television. The action by Honecker was without precedent in the history of the DDR.<sup>21</sup>

The Church reacted to the arrest by intervening to obtain Epplemann's release. As a result, he was let go after only two days. In all probability the SED feared making him a martyr. Holding him in prison was also problematic because it would have revealed the hypocrisy of the Party's ceaseless praise for actions like Epplemann's by peace activists in the West.

Although the Church acted to obtain the pastor's release it was far from supportive of the Berlin Appeal which he had co-authored. The contrast was symptomatic of the developing rift between the church hierarchy and the autonomous peace movement. This separation had also become

quite apparent with the furor over the Swords to Ploughshares patch.

The leaders of the Church reacted very critically to the contents of the Berlin Appeal and openly opposed people attaching their signatures to it. According to them, the Appeal provided "a distorted picture of those in political responsibility." The church leaders further argued against the positions set out in the Berlin Appeal maintaining that the document needed to consider the existing "political and military constellation with more precision."

Both the text of the Berlin Appeal and its impact more than sufficiently explain why the church hierarchy made these criticisms and why a rift was developing between the autonomous peace movement and the leaders of the very institution which had been instrumental to the movement's emergence.

The Berlin Appeal in part repeated the foremost objective of the West European peace movement as it was expressed in the 1980 Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament or END Appeal initiated by the Bertrand Russell Foundation. It called for the realization of a Europe free of nuclear weapons. The Berlin Appeal linked this call to demands which effectively re-opened the German Question. In particular, the Berlin Appeal proposed negotiations between the two German states about the removal of all nuclear weapons from Germany. It went on to address the division of Germany by calling for "the former allies to withdraw their

occupation troops from Germany and come to an agreement on guarantees of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the two German states."<sup>22</sup>

Proposals like these were political dynamite in the DDR. They challenged the official claim that there were now two German nations not one; they implicitly questioned the very existence of the East German state and they directly challenged the DDR's relationship with the USSR. It is no wonder the Church hierarchy was unenthusiastic about Epplemann and his views. It was widely believed, and logically so, that Havemann was mainly responsible for the document's focus on the German Question. Only months before he had written an open letter to Leonid Brezhnev. This document, which became known as 'The Havemann Initiative,' covered the same political terrain. It similarly called for the removal of all foreign troops and nuclear weapons from Germany and went on to raise the possibility of German reunification outside the two military blocs.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, Havemann's 1981 letter attracted the signatures of over 200 DDR citizens. It was also circulated in West Germany where more than 20,000 people signed it most of whom were active in the peace movement.

The influence of Rainer Epplemann was more evident elsewhere in the Berlin Appeal. Consequently, much of the remainder of the text focused on what were the clear priority issues for the autonomous peace movement at the time. Specifically, the appeal took the increasing

militarization of East German society to task by citing the production, sale and import of war toys and the widespread use of civil defense exercises. The document also repeated the call for a Social Peace Service and advocated "a great debate about questions of peace to be conducted in an atmosphere of tolerance and recognition of the right to free expression." The text went on to state, "every spontaneous manifestation of the desire for peace should be approved and encouraged."<sup>24</sup>

Once again the focus of concern was on the contradiction between official words and official deeds which Roland Jahn has cited as the autonomous peace movement's reason for existence. What is more, the demand for peace was, for all practical purposes, implicitly placing the issue of human rights on the agenda for social and political change in the DDR. This constituted yet another reason why the Berlin Appeal was problematic for the hierarchy governing 'The Church Within Socialism.' It had simply gone well beyond the limits which leaders of the Church felt they could go.

Rainer Epplermann no doubt appreciated that the hierarchy was placed in an awkward situation. But he was unmoved. The defiant Protestant Pastor illustrated this when he remarked that the Church has "a disastrously timid mentality when it comes to relations with the State."<sup>25</sup> This indicated that there was also a division between the church hierarchy and some of its lower clergy with respect

to dealing with the authorities.

If the text of the Berlin Appeal was enough to develop a rift between the church leadership and the autonomous peace movement the same was at least as true concerning its political consequences. Epplermann's arrest was only one consequence. There were also other incidences of repression. Thus, the first seventy persons to respond to its appeal for signatures were subjected to police harassment. Despite this only seven signatories withdrew their names. Subsequently, many others stepped forward to sign. Eventually over 2000 East Germans signed the appeal.

The Berlin Appeal, like the Havemann Initiative, was circulated in the West where it received the endorsement of many West European peace activists revealing for a second time a new and disturbing phenomenon for the DDR's leaders. This was the formation of links between independent peace activists in both parts of Europe and in East and West Germany in particular. This innovation would be very significant for the development of dissent and critical thought in East Germany in the 1980's.

Given phenomena like these the Church was forced to disassociate itself from the appeal. To fail to, would risk being linked to a major expression of popular political protest in the DDR. Furthermore, this was a protest that focused on the German Question and came to involve clear links to protest activity outside East Germany. This, in turn, risked allegations of complicity with externally



inspired subversive activity directed against the DDR.

Moreover, the Berlin Appeal articulated the concerns of a potentially immense social movement in the DDR. This became clear on February 13, 1982 when the 'Dresden Forum' revealed to the world the existence of a very significant autonomous peace movement in East Germany.

Every year on February 13th the DDR's official Peace Council, which strictly adheres to the political line of the SED, stages a large outdoor ceremony in Dresden commemorating the anniversary of the city's destruction during the war. But in 1982 two events were planned to mark the anniversary instead of one.

Months in advance, a group of young East Germans circulated a leaflet calling for an unofficial march to be held the same day as the official ceremony. The leaflet was circulated widely across the DDR. This was apparent when some 5000 youths converged on Dresden from all parts of East Germany despite police attempts to suppress the advance publicity and the deliberate disruption of train service to keep people away.

The authorities panicked in response to the huge turnout. Seeing this reaction and fearing a major confrontation the Church assumed a mediating role. It intervened by hastily making Dresden's Church of the Cross available as the site for a 'Peace Forum' believing this would bring the arriving demonstrators off the streets.<sup>26</sup>

The Dresden Forum turned out to be a spectacular peace

event, bearing remarkable similarities to peace actions in the West. The trappings of the Western counter-culture were evident throughout the church as were Swords to Ploughshares patches. The forum's slogan was the motto 'Make Peace Without Weapons.' Unilateralist sentiments were widely expressed.

Two topics received the most attention. One, was the persecution of people either at work or at school for wearing the Swords to Ploughshares patch or emblem. The other, was the Berlin Appeal. Indeed, interest in the appeal was pervasive among the roughly 5000 participants in the Dresden Forum and support for Rainer Epplermann was overwhelming. Consequently, when Protestant Church President Kurt Domsch spoke to the crowd and referred to the Church's disagreements with the Berlin Appeal he faced whistles and boos. The young audience wanted to have the text of the appeal read out but the church authorities present did not meet their demand.

Later, at 10:15 pm - the exact moment the allied bombing had begun 37 years earlier - some 3000 of those present abruptly rose and proceeded to stage a candlelight demonstration through the streets. The marchers sang, "We Shall Overcome." The police did not intervene to stop them. Nonetheless, 80 participants were questioned by the police the next day. Of the ones questioned three turned out to be the children of SED officials.<sup>27</sup>

News of the Dresden Forum and the unofficial

demonstration spread across the DDR due in large part to the accessibility of West German television in most of the country. Western news services gave the events international coverage. The resulting impact in the DDR was so profound that the FDJ congress which was held just ten days later countered the slogan of the Dresden Forum with the slogan 'Peace Must Be Armed.'

The contrast between the official line on peace and that of the autonomous peace movement could not have been made more clear than it was by the FDJ. In this context, neither reconciliation nor even the kind of short-lived tolerance which marked the relationship between the official and unofficial peace movements in Hungary during 1982-83 was conceivable. This was the case, despite the frequent insistence by activists in the autonomous peace movement that they did not disagree with the stated goals of the official DDR Peace Council.

There is no question that the Berlin Appeal articulated the sentiments of a great many East Germans. It also facilitated an increased polarization between this segment of civil society and the State. More precisely, the Berlin Appeal and the movement associated with it comprised signs of a rapidly spreading spirit of opposition.<sup>28</sup> The proliferation of autonomous peace actions in the wake of the Dresden Forum would provide unequivocal proof of this. In addition, the wide range of societal concerns which would find expression in the process would show that the autono-

mous peace movement, like Poland's Solidarnosc, was implicitly revolutionary in character. Just as Solidarnosc could never have been simply a trade union the East German autonomous peace movement could not help but become a focus for much more than strictly peace issues. It was an opening through which civil society could assert itself against the all-pervasive state apparatus. Perhaps no one in the DDR in 1982 understood this more acutely than the leaders of the SED. It is their hold on power which such a movement calls into question in a very fundamental way.

A great deal of activity followed soon after the Dresden Forum. In June an estimated 3500 people took part in an unofficial peace action in Potsdam and some 10,000 teenagers attended a peace-oriented religious festival in Eisenach. At the Eisenach festival East German Bishop Forck and other clerics contradicted the Church's earlier stand on the Swords to Ploughshares patch by declaring that the Church would continue to use the forbidden patch despite the state-imposed ban on it.

Elsewhere, an action in Werdau focused on the regular civil defense exercises. During one of these some local residents refused to black out their windows with paper as required. Instead, they put up cutouts of Picasso's dove of peace.<sup>29</sup>

Legislation passed on March 25, 1982 known as the Military Service Law sparked one of the most significant manifestations of popular protest in the history of the DDR.

The law was designed to empower the State to conscript any women between the ages of 18 and 50 for unarmed military service in the event of war. Its effect was to give birth to an autonomous women's peace movement and to place the emancipation of women on the agenda of much of the autonomous peace movement radicalizing it in the process.

The focal point of this protest was a lengthy open letter to SED First Secretary Honecker from women opposed to the Military Service Law. The letter appeared in October 1982 and soon after was published in a West Berlin leftist daily Tagezeitung. Its contents expressed a fusion of feminism with anti-militarism as the following excerpt indicates.

We women want to break the circle of violence and refuse our participation in all forms of violence as a means of solving conflicts. We women consider army service for women not as an expression of equality but in contradiction to our being female. For us, equality with men does not mean standing alongside men who take up arms, but to be with those who have realized like us that abstractions such as 'enemy' and 'opponent' really mean the extermination of human life, which we reject.

For their demands, the women called for a public debate of the law before its enactment and specifically asked Honecker "to give us the opportunity for an open dialogue." The women also demanded "a legal right to conscientious objection."<sup>30</sup>

Initially the women's letter had 150 signatures. This number subsequently grew to several hundred despite police repression and efforts to trivialize the protest. Some of

the women were taken in for questioning and subjected to threats. In one instance, a signatory's husband was called in and told to keep his wife under control.<sup>31</sup> Officially, there was silence in response to the letter for quite some time. This lack of a reply later moved one of the women to comment that,

Temporary arrests have been the only reaction. Apparently the men need so many weapons because they have no courage. No courage to speak to us, no courage to explain their policies, to confront our questions. But we want to talk about it, and with them, too. For we are the victims of their policies.<sup>32</sup>

In an interview, one of the women, Katja Havemann, stated that the open letter "found a large echo among DDR women." Indeed, the letter was a catalyst. Women in many parts of the DDR came together to discuss the effects of the conscription law. Some formed women's circles. For many, this was the first time they had met in a women-only-group and found the space to discuss their own self-image and their perception of their role in East German society. In the process their perspectives widened. One of the resulting aims of the women was to assist the wives and children of men who were in prison for refusing conscription. Some of the women asked women from the British-based European Nuclear Disarmament (END) campaign to send expressions of solidarity to the women demonstrating at Greenham Common.<sup>34</sup>

The open letter and the activity which developed around it were just the beginning for an emerging women's peace movement in the DDR. It was a phenomenon distinct, but by

no means separate from the autonomous peace movement as a whole.

This was apparent in the specifically women's actions initiated during 1983. The largest women's event occurred on September 19th, in an East Berlin Church. The 'Women for Peace Day' attracted some 4000 participants although many were linked to the official peace organizations and these people expressed views consistent with the SED's line on peace.

Other, smaller events were strictly unofficial in character. One, in early September, consisted of an unsuccessful attempt to form a human chain linking the U.S. and Soviet embassies. Another, on October 16, saw about three dozen women dressed from head to foot in black, hand in statements of non-compliance with the Military Service Law at the main post office on Berlin's Alexanderplatz.<sup>35</sup>

Both actions were initiatives by "Frauen fur den Freiden" or Women For Peace, a grouping based in East Berlin. Highly activist in character, this feminist peace organization focused much of its early work on seeking conscientious objector status for women and on opposing the growth of militarism in East German society. The group also demonstrated a strong interest in the relationship between the arms race and Third World hunger and sought links with the Western peace movement whose opposition to Cruise and Pershing 2 missile deployments it shared.

One of the most outspoken activists in Women For Peace

has been Barbel Bohley, a lecturer in East German women's literature who developed a revulsion against war as a result of her experiences amidst the devastation in Germany immediately following the war. Another prominent activist in the group is her friend Ulrike Poppe.

The prominence of these women did not escape the attention of the East German authorities who had them arrested on December 12, 1983. The charge laid was "treasonous divulging of information." The possible penalty for this alleged crime was twelve years imprisonment.

The State's action was a direct result of Poppe and Bohley's contacts with West European peace activists, including members of the West German Green Party who have regularly brought peace literature into the DDR for use by the autonomous peace movement. All of this indicated that the types of repressive measures initiated in the 1970's, were still very much in effect, as well as the determination of the authorities to thwart unofficial contacts with western activists.

The State's repression was not limited to these charges. It also moved to shut down an independent day-care centre operated by Ulrike Poppe and other members of Women For Peace. These women had set up this facility as an alternative to the state-run day-care centres and the public schools where children are strongly encouraged to play with war toys.

To the surprise of the SED the arrest of Ulrike Poppe



and Barbel Bohley provoked international protests. These included a large protest demonstration at a West Berlin meeting of the pro-Soviet World Peace Council. Besides this, a letter of concern was sent to Erich Honecker by a dozen organizations present at the International Peace Coordinating Conference held in Stockholm in January 1984.<sup>36</sup> Due to actions like these both women were suddenly released and all charges were dropped in February 1984.

The arrest and subsequent release of these two feminist peace activists were not exceptional events. They were indicative of a pattern evident throughout 1983 of increasing repression directed against the peace movement. This assault was only constrained by the solidarity actions organized by the western peace movement. Developments in two principal centres of autonomous peace activism highlighted this trend and posed a key dilemma for the movement's activists, one which has a major bearing on the possibilities for independent political activity in general. One of these activist centres was Jena where what amounted to a wave of repression aimed at crushing autonomous peace activism there began on Christmas Eve in 1982.

Jena was a natural place for autonomous peace activism to flourish. It had a reputation as an intellectual centre with a very active network of counter-cultural groups, loose circles of avant-garde artists, Evangelical peace groups and young people who find themselves outside the official framework of both Party and Church institutions.<sup>37</sup>

Two weeks prior to Christmas local activists from the Jena Peace Community decided they wanted to do something publicly to demonstrate their desire for a "real peace without weapons." They made plans to gather in Jena's Central Square near the Church of Peace to observe a minute's silence. Publicity for this action was simply by word of mouth.

When the authorities learned of these plans they panicked. In doing so they once again revealed their chronic sense of insecurity. Furthermore, they had even begun to envision the planned action turning into "a national demonstration with church leaders taking part." As a result of this official paranoia Jena peace activists were interrogated in the days leading up to the planned moment of silence. People were warned to stay out of the city centre on Christmas Eve. Factory meetings were even held where workers were warned against engaging in subversive activities.<sup>38</sup>

On December 24th the security apparatus was mobilized en masse. The authorities went so far as to place the paramilitary Working Class Combat Groups on alert for 'a major action against the class enemy.'<sup>39</sup> Yet, in spite of a huge police operation on the 24th approximately 200 people managed to evade the police and gather in the square. Once there they were surrounded by the police and photographed continuously while observing the minute of silence. Fourteen of those who took part were later arrested. Two of

these people got three year prison terms.

Protests by many West European peace activists, including Petra Kelly of the Greens, followed in response. The names of the fourteen peace prisoners became known across Europe much to the displeasure of the East German government which would not even acknowledge that anyone had been arrested. Here again, pressure worked. Not only were all fourteen released in February 1983 but they were also reinstated in their places of work.

Very significantly, there had not been any protests on behalf of the Jena 14 from the local church. This silence incensed peace activists in the city. Eighteen activists expressed their indignation in a letter to the Church which in part stated, "There is a border beyond which silence is guilt. Already in recent German history Christians were confronted by this painful choice." The letter was new testimony to the serious differences now apparent between the autonomous peace movement and the Church.

Jena's Peace Community, consisting of an estimated 200 activists, would face much more damaging repression a few short months later. Despite the State's hasty retreat under pressure in February and a letter to Erich Honecker protesting local police repression signed by many of Jena's activists, a process of 'decapitation' began. This involved the expulsion to West Germany of nearly the entire activist core of the Jena Peace Community.

The most famous expulsion involved one of the Jena 14,

Roland Jahn, who after being roughed up by the police was locked into the last compartment of a train to West Germany. The date of his involuntary arrival was June 7, 1983. In addition, in the three weeks prior to that date twenty-two men, women and children from Jena had also been expelled.<sup>40</sup> The effect of these actions seriously impaired the movement in Jena. However, later reports of leafletting by those activists who remained, indicate that the authorities did not succeed in crushing it.

The city of Weimar was another focal point of the State's onslaught against the autonomous peace movement in 1983. The appearance of provocative peace and other political slogans spraypainted on the city's walls late in the year served as a welcome excuse to smash ongoing peace and environmental activities not sanctioned by the Party. The slogans included "SS-20's, No Thanks," "Long Live Solidarnosc" and "Make Pickle Salad Out of the State." In the repression which ensued six local peace activists received prison sentences of up to eight months.<sup>41</sup>

The events in Weimar and Jena posed a key strategic dilemma for the movement concerning the limits to official tolerance of autonomous peace activism. They showed above all else that activity which goes outside the protective confines of the one independent institution in the DDR, the Church, is destined to provoke naked state repression. This repression, in turn, could only be constrained or alleviated by intervention from the Church, which was now less likely,

or by overt protests from supportive peace activists in the West, i.e. sections of the Greens or members of END.

The situation in Jena epitomized all of this. It was there where the most intense repression had occurred and this was not by coincidence. The Jena Peace Community had constituted a particular irritant with its bold public initiatives which, worse still, attracted media coverage in the West.<sup>42</sup> The State no doubt was also well aware of the Church's reluctance to be associated with the activists in Jena. Both factors served to make them a primary target for repression.

But at the same time if the Jena activists had shown more restraint and were careful to stay within those limits which the Church would accept they risked being ineffectual and completely marginalized. Roland Jahn keenly appreciated this danger. Consequently, even after his expulsion he remained emphatic that the Jena Peace Community was right to engage in street actions even if they led to arrests. Jahn maintained that such activities were effective because the whole town would know they had taken place.<sup>43</sup>

In effect, these activists were confronted with a tough choice. They could engage in what were, in the context of the DDR, spectacular actions and be very effective or they could adopt a safer, more cautious approach and almost certainly effect much less of an impact.

Probably at no time was this dilemma more acutely apparent than when,

On October 24 the official news agency ADN announced that preparations had begun for the deployment of 'operative-tactical missile complexes' on the territory of the DDR in response to the imminent arrival of Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles in Western Europe.<sup>44</sup>

With this announcement the DDR's peace movement was confronted with an issue not at all unlike the ones which had motivated millions of West Europeans to take to streets. But it was also an issue which touched on the fundamental aspects of the DDR's relationship with the Soviet Union and as such it constituted a potential minefield.

The dilemma was heightened by unmistakable evidence of silent but massive East German opposition to the deployment of these medium-range Soviet missiles on the DDR's territory. For example, even before the official announcement was made a national Synod of the Protestant Churches held in September stated its opposition to the deployment of any missiles in East Germany. This stand was repeated several weeks later by the Synod of the Mecklenburg District Church. Elsewhere, the SED initiated a petition campaign in the factories supporting the deployments and declaring a readiness to work an extra day a month to help pay for the new weapons. Refusal to sign was so widespread the SED abandoned circulating the petitions.<sup>45</sup>

Non-support was even apparent at the official level. Letters opposing the deployments were allowed into the official press. Honecker's public pronouncements also seemed to reflect the widespread apprehension when he stated

that the decision to deploy the missiles "produces no rejoicing in East Germany."<sup>46</sup>

The escalation of repressive actions against the autonomous peace movement was without question the main reason why expressions of opposition turned out to be relatively few in number despite this strong anti-missile sentiment. Nonetheless, the manifestations of opposition which did occur were varied in nature and still very significant. One was the appearance of the anti-SS-20 slogans in the streets of Weimar. Another, 'The Rostock Appeal,' took the form of a petition signed by over 100 people. It was issued on November 11, 1983. Proclaiming that, "There is too much at stake for us to leave the decision over life and death to the politicians and military people alone.", the appeal vigorously protested the deployment decision. Those who signed also stated their agreement with the stand of the Church on the issue and demanded of the DDR's National Defence Council "an immediate annulment of the decision made."<sup>47</sup>

The most important public response did not come until a full year later. It was a joint, open letter signed by thirteen East German peace activists and sixteen civil rights activists from Czechoslovakia who were associated with Charter 77. New Soviet missiles had been deployed on Czechoslovakia's territory simultaneously with the deployments in the DDR. Among the thirteen East German signatories were Ulrike Poppe and Barbel Bohley.

This unprecedented and historic declaration of protest was issued simultaneously in Prague and East Berlin. It opened by saying,

It is now a year since in both our countries new Soviet missiles were deployed. This step was alleged to contribute to balancing the nuclear strength of both superpowers. The official justification maintained that peace had thus been strengthened. In reality, peace was even more endangered and the arms race continues.

The joint declaration went on to state,

We therefore protest anew against the siting and extension of nuclear complexes on our territory. We are thus in solidarity with the peace movements in the West which, in their own countries, protest against militarism and nuclear armament.

The signatories concluded by calling on "independent peace movements to join this declaration."<sup>48</sup> Astonishingly, there is no evidence of significant East German police action having been taken in response. Furthermore, four of the women who signed this declaration went on to sign another open letter dated March 8, 1985. The latter document was also signed by women peace activists from Czechoslovakia, Italy, West Germany and Britain. All of these countries were the locations for recently deployed medium-range nuclear missiles. The letter itself was explicitly feminist in content and politically non-aligned, meaning it expressed loyalty towards neither side in the East-West confrontation. Its title was "For Detente from Below, for the Denuclearization of Europe."<sup>49</sup>

The fact that those who signed the women's statement and the joint Czechoslovak-East German letter escaped any



significant repression as a result indicates that the apparent caution shown by the autonomous peace movement in response to the announced deployments was a misjudgement. More numerous and pronounced protests were probably possible. This seems particularly so given both the depth of anti-missile sentiment within the DDR and the government's defensiveness as reflected in Honecker's statement. Furthermore, had there been repression massive protests from Western peace activists would certainly have followed. The open support of British, Italian and West German peace activists for the women's letter alone makes this absolutely clear. It also indicates how their collaboration expanded the political space available to their counterparts in the DDR.

The women's letter appeared shortly before the 4th convention of the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign. It took place July 3-6, 1985 in Amsterdam. The event marked a watershed in the development of an increasingly supportive and close relationship between most of the principal organizations of the West European peace movement and the independent movements for peace and civil rights in the East bloc. The DDR's independent peace activists have consistently expressed a strong identification with this process based principally on dialogue and expressions of mutual support on numerous issues related to the achievement of a durable peace in Europe.

The process is commonly referred to as 'Detente From

Below' or 'People's Detente.' Spokespersons for the official East bloc peace organizations are intensely hostile towards it. Their hostility reflects an unmistakable fear on the part of East bloc governments, including the DDR's, concerning the potential domestic consequences of this process.

There is abundant evidence indicating the importance of this phenomenon to the development of dissent and critical thought in the DDR. In a sense one can trace its significance back to the western protests against the persecution of Bahro and Biermann. This can be said to be the case since their ideas and actions were objectively groundbreaking for the autonomous peace movement. Regardless, the process was clearly evident at the Berlin Writers Gathering where critical writers from both German states spoke out on peace issues and where support for autonomous peace activism was expressed in a highly public manner by persons from each of the two German states.

Subsequently, the convergence process was exemplified by the western support given to the Havemann Initiative and the Berlin Appeal. The same was true of the protests in defense of the jailed activists in Jena, in the case of Poppe and Bohley as well as with respect to the March 8, 1985 open letter.

It is especially significant that this phenomenon has reached directly into the public places of East German cities as well as into the churches and homes of the autono-

mous peace activists. In this respect supportive West German Greens and the END have played a particularly notable role.

In view of the anti-statist and ecological politics of the Greens and of the fact that Bahro became attracted to them after his release to the West support from within their ranks for the autonomous peace movement was quite logical. So were the resulting conflicts between these Greens and East German state.

The most famous example of this friction occurred in early May 1983 when five prominent members of the Green Party, including Petra Kelly, went into East Berlin and unfurled two banners in Alexanderplatz. These read "Swords to Ploughshares" and "Disarmament East and West." The East German police attacked them, ripped up their banners and swiftly threw them back to West Berlin.<sup>50</sup> Later, after it became apparent that the police had attacked members of the West German Bundestag, Honecker publicly expressed his regret over the incident. Kelly was then invited back to East Berlin to meet Honecker and came wearing a shirt with the banned Swords to Ploughshares symbol and slogan on it.

This conciliatory gesture notwithstanding, a more or less total ban on entry to the DDR was imposed on all known Green activists. This followed Bonn's decision to deploy American Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles on West German soil. One can assume the East German leaders no longer attached as much importance to the Greens following this decision and

considered them an intolerable nuisance given this propensity to visit and solidify links with activists in the DDR's autonomous peace movement. Petra Kelly is a case in point. She made it a normal practice to use the diplomatic privileges accorded her as a Bundestag member to enter East Berlin with her briefcase full of anti-nuclear and other political literature destined for her friends in the autonomous peace movement.<sup>51</sup>

END's role is not as direct but it has been and continues to be significant nonetheless. The relationship between END and the autonomous peace movement has in large measure consisted of discreet visits to the homes of the East German activists and contacts centred around preparations for END's annual conventions. END's 'DDR Working Group' has played a major role in both respects.

With respect to links centred around preparations for the annual conventions of the END campaign the one held in West Berlin in May, 1983 was very significant. Many East German peace activists wanted to attend and END desired their participation since it always invites both official and unofficial peace representatives from East bloc states. In particular, a group of activists from Jena publicly declared their desire to attend the convention in West Berlin.<sup>52</sup> Not one activist was allowed to go.

In response to this ban fifteen Western peace activists attending the convention crossed into East Berlin separately on the evening of May 11 and met fifteen East German

activists at a private home. A meeting was held focusing on ways the Western peace activists could help their counterparts in the DDR. Furthermore,

During the meeting the East Germans attacked the East Berlin government for stopping them from attending the conference, the participants said. The East Germans urged a complete ban on the stationing of new nuclear missiles in Eastern or Western Europe and called for the establishment of a common anti-nuclear movement in the East and the West.<sup>53</sup>

Similar events have followed in the years since although not all were associated with END. One, in early 1985 involved members of the European Network for East-West Dialogue. It includes exiled members of Charter 77 and Poland's Solidarnosc. In this instance these persons actually crossed in disguise into East Berlin for the meeting with the East German peace activists.

East Germany's autonomous peace activists have expressed their desire to attend every END convention since the one held in West Berlin in 1983. They met with no success, with the exception of the 1985 Amsterdam convention where one activist managed to be present and even appeared on a panel during one of four plenary sessions. In addition to his presence, there was that of the exiled Roland Jahn and a written submission by Werner Fischer, a prominent activist in East Berlin. The document was the text of a letter he wrote to Prof. Dr. Drefahl, the President of the official Peace Council. In his letter Fischer took the positions and activities of the official body to task and reiterated several key demands of the autonomous peace movement,

calling on Drefahl to support them.<sup>54</sup>

The END convention held in Perugia, Sicily in 1984 was also very important for the autonomous peace movement. The entire proceedings of this convention were overshadowed by a dispute over who truly spoke for the cause of peace in the East bloc. Was it the official peace councils whose representatives were present in force at Perugia or the unofficial activists who, for the most part, were prevented from leaving their countries so they could attend? Inevitably, part of the discussion centred around this question focused on the unofficial East German activists, none of whom were present.

Despite the physical absence of these people they made an impact on the convention by having their ideas present. Three documents were brought out of the DDR for presentation at the convention. Significantly, their contents revealed that these statements were among the most theoretically developed and politically sophisticated tracts ever to have emerged from the autonomous peace movement. These documents were also very important because they revealed how the political perspectives of the peace movement were evolving, how many of its activists were re-thinking its strategies and, most importantly, the way much of the movement was undergoing a profound transformation in the wake of the setbacks it had endured as a result of the State's stepped up repression beginning with the events of December 24, 1982 in Jena.

One document detailed the history of their movement. Another prepared by a group of activists from East Berlin entitled, 'Fundamentals of a Peace Strategy' hinted at the kind of change which was occurring within the East German movement by noting the kind of changes it saw taking place within the European movement. In this respect the East Berlin activists proclaimed, "The peace movement is increasingly becoming a broad survival movement in which ecological, emancipatory and social questions are involved."

The authors of this document also took what was an unprecedented step for East Germans in openly considering the possibility of the movement going beyond protest to resistance. They specifically stated,

Equally we have to discuss within the peace movement the forms of resistance. Resistance must not only be discussed abstractly on the basis of ethical and moral principles but also on the basis of its political practicability and in the context of a given situation.<sup>55</sup>

The other document submitted to the END convention in Perugia was headed 'On the Question of the Autonomy and Ideological Independence of the Peace Movement in the East and West.' In this commentary on the global movement, the anonymous East German activists who wrote it argued that "the peace movement, if it wants to have any impact must become a movement for emancipation in the broadest sense." Continuing in a vein quite like the other document they contended,

The peace movement must become a social movement itself, must not confine itself to questions of

disarmament, but must regard the many different forces of emancipation (Third World, environmental, women's, human rights movements) all as coming within the movement. At the same time it must remain a decentralised, grass-roots movement.

The authors also made a politically consistent case for non-alignment in relation to the two superpower-dominated military blocs stating how the peace movement,

...must therefore enjoy autonomy from the established political systems and must not be susceptible to being taken over by them. It must also enjoy autonomy from the two superpowers, and from those who represent their interests, and this is in itself a reason why the movement must transcend the two blocs.<sup>56</sup>

If one considers the orientation of the West German Green Party which integrates anti-nuclear policies with feminism, ecological activism and varying degrees of support for the independent movements of the East bloc and END's resolutely non-aligned approach to peace activism, these two documents definitively illustrate the strength of the relationship which the autonomous peace movement has developed with these organizations and how they have had a very substantial influence on the evolution of its politics. In another respect, these documents also demonstrate how the most vocal and articulate activists in the movement were becoming more bold in their objectives and more radical in their critiques.

Consequently, it is little wonder that the DDR's rulers have not only continued to restrict access by western peace activists to the DDR but have steadily widened the net by increasing the number of persons who they will not let in.



In addition, the East German authorities have also moved to restrict the movement of the autonomous peace activists by making it harder for them to visit countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Previously, they had relatively free access.<sup>57</sup>

This new step must be seen as a response to their widening efforts, aided in large measure by western peace activists who frequently function as go-betweens, to collaborate with independent political activists in other East bloc states. The joint East German-Czechoslovakian anti-missile declaration can be identified as the first clear public expression and result of such efforts. Numerous other examples of collaboration have followed. Some, like the March 8, 1985 women's letter, involved western activists as well. Others have involved only persons from member states of the Warsaw Pact.

One of the most important and recent examples of this collaboration among East bloc activists, including East Germans, was an October 23, 1986 statement on the 30th Anniversary of the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution. Sixteen key East German activists were among the 91 signatories from the DDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Many of the others were leading spokespersons for Solidarnosc, Charter 77 and the democratic opposition in Hungary.

The short but concise text of this historic statement read as follows:

On the day of the anniversary we appeal to our friends around the world to join us in commemorating the 1956 Revolution in Hungary. We declare our joint determination to struggle for political democracy in our countries, pluralism based on principles of self-management, peaceful reunification of divided Europe and its democratic integration, as well as for the rights of all minorities.

We emphasize support for one another in our current attempts for a better, free and decent life in our country and the whole world.

The tradition and the experience of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 remain our common heritage and inspiration.<sup>58</sup>

The statement highlighted two multifaceted developments in the autonomous peace movement in East Germany. One, was the way in which the movement was in the process of closing ranks in a practical way with the forces of political opposition active elsewhere in Eastern Europe and in a manner complementary to the continuation of its ongoing links with peace and ecological activists in Western Europe. The other development has been the growing inclination of at least a large and influential section of the autonomous peace movement to evolve into a consciously oppositional force within the DDR. This force has shown itself to be one which openly aspires to both a radical democratization of the DDR's political system and the far-reaching transformation of East German society.

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>3</sup>John Sanford, The Sword and the Ploughshare: Autonomous Peace Initiatives in East Germany (Merlin Press/END, 1983), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Joyce Marie Mushaben, "Swords to Ploughshares: The Church, the State and the East German Peace Movement" Studies in Comparative Communism, Vol. XVII No. 2, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup>John Sanford, Op. Cit., p. 31.

<sup>6</sup>Joyce Marie Mushaben, Op. Cit., p. 127.

<sup>7</sup>Editors, "A Short History of the Peace Movement" Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 1, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup>Joyce Marie Mushaben, Op. Cit., p. 127.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>10</sup>Roger Woods, Op. Cit., p. 187.

<sup>11</sup>Adam Hochschild, "Behind the Lines With Europe's Most Daring Peace Activists" Mother Jones September/October 1982, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup>Eric Pooley, "East Germany Unsure How to Deal With Peace Protesters", East European Solidarity Committee, ed., Peace in the East, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>John Sanford, Op. Cit., p. 50.

<sup>14</sup>Roland Jahn, "Forward to the DDR Response to the Prague Appeal" East European Reporter, Vol. 1 No. 3, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>Adam Hochschild, Op. Cit., p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>The Initiative-Group 'Social Service for Peace', "Appeal from The Initiative-Group 'Social Service for Peace'", Roger Woods, Ed., Opposition in the DDR Under Honecker 1971-85 (MacMillan Press, 1986), p. 194.

<sup>17</sup>Joe Singleton, "Unofficial Peace Movement in the DDR", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 5 No. 1-2, p. 42.

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- <sup>19</sup>Robert Havemann, "For a Free Peace Movement in the DDR, too", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 5 Nos. 1-2, p. 29.
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- <sup>21</sup>Robert Havemann, Op. Cit., p. 29.
- <sup>22</sup>Rainer Epplermann & Robert Havemann, "The Berlin Appeal", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 5 Nos. 1-2, p. 42.
- <sup>23</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "Robert Havemann 1910-1982", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 5 Nos. 3-4, p. 32.
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- <sup>26</sup>John Sanford, Op. Cit., p. 67.
- <sup>27</sup>Adam Hochschild, Op. Cit., p. 36.
- <sup>28</sup>Joyce Marie Mushaben, Op. Cit., p. 123.
- <sup>29</sup>Adam Hochschild, Op. Cit., p. 37.
- <sup>30</sup>Editors, "Hundreds of Women Make Pacifist Protest", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 5 Nos. 5-6, p. 39.
- <sup>31</sup>Editors, "Protest Letter from DDR Women", END Journal No. 2, p. 10.
- <sup>32</sup>Editors, "Women in the Peace Movement: Interview with an Activist", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 6 Nos. 1-2, p. 27.
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<sup>37</sup>Gus Fagan, "The Peace Movement Enters its Second Year", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 6 Nos. 1-2, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup>Jurgen Fuchs, "Jena's Independent Peace Movement", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 6 Nos. 1-2, p. 20.

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<sup>41</sup>East German Peace Activist, "Background to the Arrests in Weimer" Across Frontiers, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "Fighting Doves", New Statesman June 24, 1983, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup>Personal Communication from Roland Jahn during the 1985 END Convention.

<sup>44</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "Hard Times Ahead for the Peace Movement", Labour Focus in Eastern Europe, Vol. 7 No. 1, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup>Reuter, "Protests Rise East of Berlin Wall", Toronto Star November 21, 1983, p. A12.

<sup>46</sup>Jesse Schulman, "Nuclear Debate Stirs Discontent in East Germany", Toronto Globe & Mail, December 3, 1983, p. 19.

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<sup>51</sup>Personal Communication from Petra Kelly during the 1985 END Convention.

<sup>52</sup>Jena Peace Activists, "For a Real Peace Without Weapons", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 6 Nos. 1-2, p. 25.

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<sup>55</sup>Editors, "Fundamentals of a Peace Strategy", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 1, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup>Roger Wood, ed., "On Questions of Autonomy and 'Ideological Independence' of the Peace Movement in East and West", Opposition in the DDR Under Honecker 1971-85 (MacMillan Press, 1986), p. 204.

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<sup>58</sup>Editors, "Hungarian Appeal", Across Frontiers, Vol. 3 No. 3, p. 1.

## CHAPTER VII

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECOLOGY: THE NEW OPPOSITION

In the past couple of years two things have occurred which have been especially conducive to the expansion of the focus of contemporary dissent and critical thought in the DDR and to the emergence of a consciously oppositional force. One has been the relative downturn in the strength and level of activity of the autonomous peace movement which, in turn, has prompted a period of reappraisal within it. The other related development has been the increase in prominence given to ecological and explicitly human rights demands by prominent activists within the movement. Both have had the effect of helping to facilitate the formulation of a deeper, more incisive critique of East German society by this emerging opposition.

The intensified repression which commenced with the crackdown in Jena continued through into 1986. Peace activists continued to be deported and sent to prison. The activity of autonomous peace groups was disrupted by police infiltration.<sup>1</sup> In Jena itself, the autonomous peace activism of four years ago was all but extinguished leaving only sporadic events held within the confines of the Church.

A degree of demoralization also set in after the Soviet missiles were deployed marking a notable parallel with developments in Western Europe. The net effect of both the repression and this demoralization has been to significantly reduce the number of autonomous peace groups. In addition,

a great many of those which have survived feel compelled to do what has been done in Jena and rely much more on the protective umbrella of the Protestant Church. Such developments have been coupled with the dampening effects of recent Soviet bloc peace initiatives. In particular, these have encouraged greater stress on personal actions.<sup>2</sup> This seems to indicate that Mikhail Gorbachev's skill at public relations may have swayed the opinions of many within the autonomous peace movement in East Germany.

All of these trends were in evidence during the Protestant Church's 1986 Peace Week where participation was down from recent years. The 1986 theme was "Peace Be With You" and in Jena one of the workshops held was about the Gorbachev style "new thinking." This topic was necessarily raised with care since the ruling SED has shown more than a distinct lack of enthusiasm concerning Gorbachev's moves towards a more open and slightly more democratic system in the USSR. The SED leaders have gone to the length of restricting media coverage about this subject to censored TASS reports issued without comment.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, as many groups have adjusted to the present domestic situation by withdrawing deeper into the protective confines of the Protestant Church, others have increasingly shifted their focus to new issues, including human rights issues. These groups tend to include the most articulate and high profile activists. What is more, this shift coincides with the intensification of the political debate



concerning what the future course and orientation of the movement should be. In this regard Gunter Minnerup has noted how,

East Berlin, with its relatively well-developed alternative organizational and communication structures centred around Pastor Rainer Epplemann and its close links with West Berlin and the East German activists exiled there, has been at the forefront of the political debates. In the search for possible new avenues of political activity some have looked towards the West German Green Party as a model, some towards other East European movements such as Charter 77.<sup>4</sup>

In Eastern Europe, human rights activity and the work of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia are synonymous. Accordingly, recent indications of heightened East German interest in the example set by Charter 77 have coincided with greater concern for explicitly human rights issues and in particular with the crystallization of an organized human rights initiative within the framework of the autonomous peace movement.

Its name is the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights.' This name alone demonstrates the group's affinity with Charter 77 which has consistently maintained that peace and human rights are indivisible issues. There are three recognized spokespersons for the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights.' The most vocal of these is Wolfgang Templin, an activist in the autonomous peace movement and a Marxist who resigned from the SED in 1983 over disagreements with its policies.

In a recent essay Templin put this new organization in

an historical context citing how there has been a distinct absence of human rights initiatives in the DDR. Human rights was, until very recently a topic which could be discussed, but in his words, it "was not admitted as a problem of action in solidarity." Templin further argues that the lack of democracy in the DDR "remained largely unconsidered." He attributed this to "the influence of church policies and the well-meaning naivety of many activists."

Templin also considered human rights issues as they related to the Helsinki Agreements. He noted how the agreements were not utilized by anyone in the DDR to promote human rights as Charter 77 had done. Instead, he correctly observed that the Helsinki Agreements were seized on as a means to gain the right to legally emigrate to West Germany.<sup>5</sup>

These observations imply that the bitter experiences of the autonomous peace movement in being the object of repression by the State were conducive to and a prerequisite for the initiation of concerted human rights activity in the DDR. This perception is also evident in the following observation by Wolfgang Templin with reference to the Warsaw Pact countries.

Any independent social activity in our countries, if it reaches a certain level of determination and commitment, is soon confronted with the totality of domination and repression which embraces all spheres of our society. If the reaction then is not to be the resignation of the flight into private life or the other Germany, the question of one's ability to act and of the prospects for social change are posed.<sup>6</sup>

Three very recent documents explicitly illustrate what

the practical results of Templin's analysis have been and the way in which human rights issues have risen to unprecedented prominence in the process. One of these documents contains a programmatic statement including a set of human rights demands. Another was a letter circulated by the Initiative among the autonomous peace groups. The third and most recent document was a declaration of solidarity addressed to Charter 77.

The programmatic document was issued on January 24, 1986. It appeared in the form of a letter addressed to Erich Honecker signed by the three public spokespersons for the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights' and Rainer Epplermann, leaving no doubt as to the group's close association with the autonomous peace movement. The letter opened by noting that the UN had declared 1986 the 'Year of Peace' and then focused on what the authors saw as the issue of internal peace. The views they expressed in this letter to Honecker again showed the strength of the affinity of their views on peace with those of Charter 77. For example, they stated,

We feel that only a state which is at internal peace with itself can play a convincing role in the search for global peace. For us, internal peace means the guarantee and practical realization of the basic rights contained within the general declaration of human rights.<sup>7</sup>

The demands set out in the letter to Honecker included calls for unrestricted freedom to travel for all citizens, the nomination of independent candidates for municipal and

parliamentary elections and freedom of assembly and association unless those involved "have fascist, militarist, racist or terroristic aims." Epplemann and the Initiative spokespersons coupled these demands for greater political democracy in the DDR with others typical of the autonomous peace movement. Notably, the letter demanded, "The legalization of conscientious objection, through the creation of an alternative civilian service independent of all military structure" and "The abolition of military education at polytechnic high schools." The document concluded by challenging Honecker's government to engage in a dialogue with people of different opinions as a prerequisite for achieving internal peace and initiating a process of constructive change.<sup>8</sup>

The Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights' letter which was circulated early in 1986 among the autonomous peace groups was signed by Templin and the other two group spokespersons. It addressed the peace groups saying, "The recognition of a need to link peace with human rights is growing within the peace movement." and that this was happening because "Many of the experiences of the past few years have shown how the aims of peace work are dependent on the realization of basic democratic rights and freedoms."

The letter included a recollection of the brief history of the Initiative tracing it back to the summer of 1985 and noting how the organization involved people in various Berlin peace groups. Significantly, the letter was very

critical of the Church in Berlin for having cancelled a human rights seminar and it strongly condemned both sides in the arms race asserting,

The two great blocs continue to arm themselves without any consideration for the victims. Negotiations take place behind closed doors; peace activists are increasingly persecuted and sometimes criminalized. The 'Western democracies' are no better in these matters than our own rulers.<sup>9</sup>

Towards its conclusion the letter expressed the Initiative's desire to extend its peace and human rights activity across the DDR and sought the cooperation of the other autonomous peace groups in this regard.

This past year's Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights' declaration of solidarity with Charter 77 was its way of marking the Czechoslovak human rights group's tenth year in existence. The declaration was signed by thirty persons from either the Initiative group or other peace groups. It cited Charter 77 as a "source of inspiration."

The declaration contrasted human rights activism in the DDR with such work in Czechoslovakia noting how, "In East Germany human rights activity emerged as a distinct component of a broad, independent peace movement." It went on to express the signatories support for pluralism and the democratization of their respective societies.<sup>10</sup> The statement concluded by appealing to Charter 77 "for a closer collaboration in solidarity despite the frontiers which are almost sealed for us."

Prior to the 1980's oppositionists in the East bloc

preoccupied themselves with either human rights issues or the struggle for national self-determination in their respective countries or with both. In the current decade these concerns have been complemented by ones over the rights of workers, the threat of nuclear annihilation and, increasingly, the devastation of the ecology. The last of these has been complemented by the birth of significant ecological activism in the DDR, Poland, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, in Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, this phenomenon has gained major political significance and has been infused with a greater sense of urgency as a direct result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster which sparked significant protest actions in the region. These things were reflected in large measure in the DDR further revealing how the political activities which have been spawned by the rise of the autonomous peace movement are calling into question the very nature and direction of contemporary East German society.

The Protestant Church has played a midwife role with respect to the birth of the autonomous ecology movement, effectively duplicating its role in relation to the peace movement. The existence of this parallel stems in part, from the close inter-relationship between the peace and ecology movements. It is also a clear result of the way the Church has offered a protective shield to both, given its institutional sovereignty.

Church-based ecological activism can be traced back to

November 1979. In the town of Schwerin fifty members of a church-based youth group, in co-operation with a local firm, planted trees and bushes along a new tram line. They repeated this action twice in 1980. More people got involved and the group received reports of interest and support from elsewhere in the DDR.<sup>11</sup> Soon such tree planting was a country-wide phenomenon designed as a protest against "the soulless concrete wastes of new building developments."

Informal bicycle demonstrations were another form of protest. In Schwerin these were held to oppose the construction of a new motorway through a popular local recreation area. In Halle, bicycle demonstrations were held as a way to focus attention on the pollution of the atmosphere by the local chemical works. Elsewhere, church-based ecology groups in Weimar engaged in a variety of activities. These included unauthorized efforts to clean up streams, improve playgrounds and tree planting.

Although such initiatives were not openly political they were uncontrolled and managed to attract a lot of local support. Consequently, they set precedents which would likely lead to more unauthorized activity and progressively undermine the SED's control of civil society in the process. In effect, these novel ecological protest actions constituted a form of social resistance. This is why the authorities reacted by either forbidding or at least hindering them.<sup>12</sup> That also partly explains why the

authorities' responses to them tended to be conditioned by whether they were carried out within the framework of the Church or not. The late 1983 crackdown in Weimer directed against both peace and ecology activists was a case in point since these had been actions staged clearly outside this framework.

Overall, the surge of ecological activism was significant for the DDR as a whole. This became evident in April 1983 when the first DDR-wide meeting of ecology groups was held in Wittenburg attracting representatives of interested groups from dozens of cities and towns.<sup>13</sup> It was also apparent in the attention given to ecological issues by the Church during discussions with the government and has likewise been demonstrated by the autonomous peace groups whose events have often included discussions about ecology. Indeed, many ecological activists have also been autonomous peace activists and vice-versa.

The issue of nuclear power has been instrumental in placing ecological concerns at the forefront of oppositional activity in the DDR and, more generally, in giving them added political weight within East German society. Concerns about nuclear power were first raised by the Church which expressed these in statements it made about ecological issues and during its discussions with the State in 1980. In this respect, the Church was in advance of the ecology groups whose focus was on the kinds of local issues noted above or on issues like domestically-produced sources of air



pollution and the acid rain threat to East Germany's forests. The Chernobyl disaster abruptly altered their priorities.

The SED is clearly, if reluctantly committed to nuclear power. At the time of the Chernobyl accident it accounted for approximately 12% of the DDR's electricity and there were two nuclear plants in operation. Another six are scheduled to go into operation by the mid-1990's. Furthermore, East Germany is energy poor and, according to Honecker, the use of brown coal as an energy source has led to "great environmental problems."<sup>14</sup> The DDR is also bound by the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance's (COMECON) firm commitment to the rapid expansion of nuclear power generation in the East bloc.

These facts together with the uncritical acceptance of modern technology, which is an inherent part of the ideology of the SED, underline this official support of nuclear power development. They also accentuate the profound nature of the challenge to the East German social order inherent in manifestations of opposition to reliance on this energy source.

The East German authorities initially responded to the accident at Chernobyl by having the official media give it a low profile. This was futile since East Germans were watching West German television. So the official posture was forced to shift. The media started playing down the role of nuclear power in meeting the DDR's energy needs and

stressing that East Germany's reactors were different from the ones used at Chernobyl. Such claims did not change the fact that public confidence was undoubtedly shaken nor did they prevent an unprecedented public debate from taking place over whether to continue to use nuclear power.

The Church adopted a high profile in this debate. Protestant Church leader Bishop Gottfried took the Soviets to task for the initial lack of information about the disaster and asked, "whether all nuclear power plants would always constitute a grave threat to humanity, no matter how good the safety precautions." The Synod of Evangelical Churches was more specific in issuing a unanimous call for a public discussion about its phase-out and about developing soft energy sources, reducing energy consumption and changing lifestyles in the DDR.<sup>15</sup>

At the grass-roots level one church-based group went so far as to send a protest letter to the Soviet Embassy. The Soviets responded by giving the group an official audience at the building. By contrast, the DDR's authorities would not prove to be as accommodating to expressions of concern about nuclear power coming from East German citizens. This was undoubtedly the case because these were initiatives launched by activists from the autonomous peace and ecology groups. These people did more than merely question the wisdom of East Germany's reliance on nuclear power.

There were two major initiatives. One was a June 1986 petition organized by two activists, including Initiative

'Peace and Human Rights' spokesperson Ralf Hirsch, and signed by over 1000 persons. This short document called on the Volkskammer to use the constitutional power it theoretically possesses to hold a referendum on the continued use of nuclear energy. The petition also stipulated that, "It is absolutely necessary that there be both wide discussion and the provision of comprehensive information about the advantages and dangers of nuclear energy." The petition's signatories further asserted their belief that, "This discussion should result in alternative concepts being put to the vote alongside the already existing ones."<sup>16</sup>

By duplicating the Church's call for an open public debate, in addition to making the call for a referendum, the signatories were effectively advocating a major step towards the political democratization of the DDR and thus were also consistent with the objectives of the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights.' Rainer Epplemann and Robert Havemann had done essentially the same thing in calling for free expression concerning peace issues in the text of the Berlin Appeal. However, Havemann and Epplemann had not been onside with the Church in their implicit advocacy of freedom of speech. Nor did their suggestion coincide with the appearance of explicit human rights proclamations as was the case in the first half of 1986. The differences in the situations stemmed from the fact that there was now at least a momentary convergence of the concerns and explicit demands being made by the critical voices in East German society.

Furthermore, this difference in part testified to just what a profound impact Chernobyl was having in the DDR.

Whereas the petition for a referendum confined itself mainly to calling for a full public debate and to laying out a general framework within which it could occur as a lead-up to a referendum the other major initiative amounted to a vital contribution to the growing unofficial debate on nuclear power. "Chernobyl Is Everywhere" was the title of this initiative which was described as an "Appeal to the Government and People of the DDR from the Independent Peace and Ecology Movement and Other Concerned Citizens."<sup>17</sup>

The appeal highlighted the way in which the accident gave activists in the autonomous groups a new issue to unite around. In so doing the disaster galvanized many groups which had been succumbing to feelings of resignation and disillusionment. Chernobyl also gave them an unprecedented opportunity to challenge the growth-oriented character of the SED's economic policies and to articulate an East German variant of 'Green Politics' as an alternative.

"Chernobyl is Everywhere" was a hard hitting statement issued in mid-1986 and signed by 141 persons. In one respect it sharply criticized the East German authorities for the official secrecy surrounding the development of nuclear power and their deliberate stifling of public discussion concerning its desirability. The text stated,

The real dangers of running these reactors have been underestimated in the socialist countries and, especially in the DDR, blatantly minimized

and swept under the carpet in order to avoid public discussion. Critical voices were hardly able to make themselves heard: sceptics were hardly able to gain sufficient information.

The authorities seemingly blind faith in "growth for growth's sake" without regard for the consequences was criticized, highlighting the signatories concern over the prevalence of an exploitative relationship toward the environment. The signatories also expressed their support for views very similar to those of Bahro and seemed to share his goal of realizing a model of East German Socialism which would be qualitatively different from and superior to the advanced capitalist societies of the West.

The competition between the two systems should not be predominantly about a competition of growth for growth's sake, whilst ignoring the incalculable growth in the resulting hazards and long-term damage.

Similarly,

The development of Socialism means to us the application of different concepts of the terms progress and growth and not to use the insanity of capitalist wastefulness as our own yardstick. Social progress and growth are not only expressed in the increase in production of consumer goods but can also be shown in the reduction of the working week and working life, in the increase in the amount of yearly holiday or the introduction of educational sabbaticals from work. Growth does not have to mean "more cars" but can be a radical improvement of public transportation, making it free for all, even in rural areas. There are many more examples which one could add.

The persons who attached their name to "Chernobyl Is Everywhere" went much farther in their demand than those who backed the petition for a referendum. This statement explicitly called for "the decommissioning of the DDR's two

existing reactors and the abandonment of its ambitious atomic energy program." They likewise demanded a debate. But in this respect too, these people were more radical and stated,

But what above all will be necessary is a wide public discussion about the quality of life and expectations in a socialist society so that those concerned in the future will be able to consider and determine what sort of progress they are prepared to accept and at what price.<sup>18</sup>

By making such statements both the authors and the signatories were for all intents and purposes expressing their desire for both freedom of expression in the DDR and radical changes in the nature and direction of East German society. Significantly, the 141 people who signed "Chernobyl Is Everywhere" included activists from the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights' and the Women For Peace group in East Berlin.<sup>19</sup> Their involvement provided clear evidence of how the autonomous peace movement in that city has been pivotal to the emergence of a consciously oppositional force in East German society.

Two other recent and very important documents have pointed out this same phenomenon. One was a formal reply, issued on June 8, 1985, to Charter 77's Prague Appeal. The Charter 77 document had appeared earlier in 1985 in anticipation of the END convention in Amsterdam. The Prague Appeal outlined Charter 77's vision of a united European continent freed from the confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The East German reply to it was signed by

twenty-one activists including Ulrike Poppe, Barbel Bohley, Ralf Hirsch, Werner Fischer and Rainer Epplemann. The reply commented on Charter 77's views on Europe and broadly defined the kind of social and political transformation these activists hoped to see in both the DDR and Czechoslovakia. As such it set a precedent for the 1987 declaration of solidarity with Charter 77 by the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights.'

In their reply the East Germans expressed agreement with the goals of removing all foreign troops from Europe and dissolving the military blocs. They also welcomed Charter 77's discussion of the German Question in the Prague Appeal and called for its solution as "part and parcel of a treaty encompassing all of Europe." The East Germans further asserted that the realization of a peaceful and united Europe required the transformation of the prevalent social and political relations in the DDR and Czechoslovakia.

This document repeated the call made a year earlier for the peace movement to become "an emancipation movement in the broadest sense." The East Germans also broke new ground by addressing what they saw as the goals of the workers' movement. These goals were "the elimination of stupefying work and the extension of self-determination in the workplace." Most important of all, the East German activists outlined the kind of social system they desired to achieve. It would be,

A form of Democratic Socialism, freed by means of

socialization and decentralization from the system of growth at any price and oriented towards an ecological humanism.<sup>20</sup>

The other document to come out of East Berlin was the most comprehensive and incisive critique of East German society ever advanced by a group in the DDR. This was an open letter to the Eleventh Congress of the SED held in April 1986. Many of the persons who signed the reply to the Prague Appeal were among the twenty-one who signed this document. However, one especially notable new person attached her name to the open letter to the SED Congress. This was Robert Havemann's widow, Annedore.

Virtually every major area of public concern in East German society was at least touched on. At its outset the letter delivered a sweeping broadside against the ruling party. The document attacked the SED for its political repression, closed nature, ideological dogmatism and the way it has excluded the population from decision-making by formulating policy "over their heads." Essentially the same criticism is made with respect to economic policies.

Decisions about particular branches of the economy, about the distribution of investment, about the nature of production, about variations on and alternatives to the plan, are not up for discussion, neither inside or outside the enterprises. Even economic functionaries, planners, designers and technicians are left with only the details of execution; at best, they can make only cosmetic corrections.

Quite predictably the question of the devastation of the ecology in the DDR was also raised. The Party's critics branded the DDR "Europe's leader in air and water pollution



and in the destruction of the soil." In addition, they scolded the SED for failing to openly recognize how nature can be irreparably damaged and for maintaining that "technology can repair the damage."

The SED's housing and development policies were taken to task as well together with the general policy directions guiding East Germany medical care. With respect to the latter one of the charges made is that,

The maintenance of the workforce is given priority over general health care for the population, in particular for pensioners, who appear at best to be a marginal concern for medical care and for social policy as a whole.

Official policies relating to women are also subjected to criticism for often frustrating progress towards achieving equality between the sexes.

Substantial attention is directed toward the problems encountered by scientists. In one very important respect the letter to the SED Congress notes that "the criteria of cadre politics usually replace those of competence." Essentially the same charge is repeated with respect to cultural, educational and youth policies in what amounts to a barrage of criticism aimed at the stranglehold which the SED exercises over civil society in the DDR. In relation to youth policies the authors of the open letter singled out the Free German Youth for harsh criticism due to the way it dominates leisure activities for young people. Elsewhere, in a more general condemnation of the SED's youth policies these critics state,

These practices restrict creativity and activity. One can see that many young people retreat, at an early ages, into petit-bourgeois family life and consumerism.

The twenty-one activists from East Berlin devote the latter part of their open letter to the Party Congress to chronicling three years of political repression directed at the autonomous peace movement and to a critique of the DDR's peace and security policy. With respect to the latter the DDR's recent disarmament proposals are given credit as indications of "a serious desire to end the arms race." But such proclamations are described as empty "if at the same time the DDR continues to participate in the arms race." The letter goes on to criticize the East German leaders "for clinging to the spirit and logic of deterrence" and for "the permanent militarization of society" with the "aim of creating discipline in order to maintain the political status quo."

Several of the standard concerns of the autonomous peace movement were raised once again. So were the SED's policies designed to prevent,

... members of the West German Greens or representatives of other significant peace organizations in Western countries from entering the DDR and thus from talking with members of the DDR's peace movement.

In making this point the activists from East Berlin clearly insinuated that the Party's actions in blocking such contacts were contradictory to the genuine pursuit of peace.

Although most of the open letter is a critique of SED

policies there were some specific proposals set out and these were quite daring. For example, the critics called for "a policy aimed at the medium term withdrawal of the DDR from the Warsaw Pact to encourage the process of military disengagement from Central Europe." They also came out in favour of the signing of peace treaties with both German states formally ending World War II. This would have the effect of facilitating "the complete sovereignty of the DDR."

Towards the conclusion of the document one very significant proposal for institutional change is made. This called for the formation of an independent peace council to co-exist with the official one. The purpose of this new council would be to "co-ordinate theoretical and practical initiatives on the theme of peace with the aim of harmonizing the interests of State and society."<sup>21</sup>

The 21 East Berlin activists did not openly acknowledge it in their letter to the SED Congress, but there can be no doubt, given the text of other statements which appeared in roughly the same time period and the Hungarian Appeal which appeared several months later, that they understood what could result from the creation of an independent peace council. Namely, it could open an unprecedented breach in East German society through which the suppressed aspirations of the population could be expressed. This would effectively mean allowing all the latent forces of social pluralism to be unleashed in a way not so different from

what happened in Poland when the government conceded the right to form an independent trade union organization to the Polish workers.

An independent peace council could similarly have the kind of effect Bahro noted with respect to the transformed Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in early 1968. The Czechoslovak opening had, in his words, "made every compass needle of hope in society at once being to swing round and point towards the Party."

The strength of the autonomous peace movement in 1982-83 together with the depth of anti-missile sentiment evident at the time of the Soviet missile deployments in late 1983 are but two indications of how easily the formation of an independent peace council could have such an effect. Nonetheless, an effect of this kind would be certain to develop more gradually. The present, relative weakness of the autonomous peace movement which is comprised of an estimated few thousand persons in approximately 200 groups is one reason this would tend to be the case. Another is the pervasive sense of resignation within the population at large. This hopelessness is, in turn, reinforced by the certainty of a hostile reaction by the DDR's Warsaw Pact allies to any development like the formation of an independent peace council especially in East Germany.

Nonetheless, the proposal along with the others concerning continued membership in the Warsaw Pact and East German sovereignty as well as the open letter to the SED

Congress itself, is enormously significant. The proposal is significant because it is symptomatic of the crystallization of not just a new political opposition but one with an in-depth political critique of the nature and direction of East German society complete with a specific proposal for an institutional mechanism designed to initiate a process of major social and political change.

In addition, the importance of this new democratic and ecologically-oriented opposition is accentuated by the fact that it has emerged from within the core of the most durable and significant movement of protest ever to have existed in the DDR. It is likewise a phenomenon which, as the debate over nuclear power indicated most recently, has proven itself capable of tapping into the very real aspirations of a large segment of East German civil society. In this respect, the new opposition has only one short-lived precedent, the spontaneous, revolutionary workers' movement of June 1953. Furthermore, the importance of this new opposition is made even more profound by its ongoing links to and collaboration with oppositional movements in both halves of Europe and by the increased space this creates for it and by the new political space it is virtually certain to acquire as a result of the changes underway in the USSR, the SED's stubborn resistance to following Gorbachev's policies of "Glasnost" and "Perestroika" notwithstanding.<sup>22</sup>

East Germany's leaders consequently now find themselves in a situation familiar to their counterparts in

Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. They now have to contend with a numerically small but serious, articulate, bold and dynamic opposition which appears destined to be an ongoing force in the life of the German Democratic Republic and which, in the event of a significant political opening, could potentially be placed at the forefront of a movement of social resistance.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Disarmament Campaigns Editors, "The East German Peace Movement", Peace Magazine, Vol. 2 No. 7, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Disarmament Campaigns Editors, "DDR Peace Days", Peace Magazine, Vol. 2 No. 7, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Werner Fischer, "Irritation in the SED?", East European Reporter, Vol. 2 No. 3, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "East German Activists Take Up Human Rights Issue", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 2, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Wolfgang Templin, "On Petr Uhl's 'Human Rights and Political Revolution'", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 9 No. 1, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Gunter Minnerup, Op. Cit., p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>Gunter Minnerup, Op. Cit., p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup>East German Peace Activists, "Charter 77 A Source of Inspiration", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup>European Nuclear Disarmament, "Ecology in Eastern Europe", END Factsheet, Spring 1987, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>East German Peace Activist, "Background to the Arrests in Weimar", Across Frontiers, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Gunter Minnerup, "Hard Times Ahead for Peace Movement", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 7 No. 1, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>Stephen Brown, "Anti-Nuclear Feeling Grows in the DDR", END Journal No. 25, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Martin Bottger and Ralf Hirsch, "Petition to Hold a Referendum on the Use of Nuclear Power in the DDR", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 3, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup>East German Peace Activists, "Chernobyl is Everywhere", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 3, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>Kevin Ball, "New Voices from East Berlin", Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Vol. 8 No. 3, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup>East German Peace Activists, "DDR Reply to the Prague Appeal", East European Reporter, Vol. 1 No. 3, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup>Editors, "Democratic Opposition in East Germany", Across Frontiers, Vol. 3 No. 3, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup>Werner Fischer, "Irritation in the SED?", East European Reporter, Vol. 2 No. 3, p. 50.



## CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

Shortly after his arrival in the West Nico Huebner, a disenchanted young East German remarked, "There is a complete lack of any central liberal alternative" in the DDR.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, since the consolidation of the SED's monopoly of power at the end of the 1940's no such alternative has existed either institutionally or as a manifestation of either organized or high profile dissent. This is due to the fact that dissent has been either leftist or Christian in orientation or has involved a fusion of both leftist politics and Christian doctrine.

Accordingly, the workers' insurrection of June 1953 decisively demonstrated the East German workers' strong rejection of SED rule and their allegiance either to the West German SPD or to the ideals of the more radical wing of the German workers' movement. The dynamics of the revolt also indicated a very radical character, i.e. mass strikes and the appearance of autonomous factory committees.

In 1956, the dissident movement centred around Wolfgang Harich and the Marxist intelligentsia. So neither could this movement be characterized as liberal. These SED dissidents accordingly desired the realization of a 'Polish October in the DDR' ostensibly as a means to put East Germany's Marxist course back on track. They did not seek to abandon it. Likewise their programmatic goals knowingly implied movement towards achieving a united, socialist

Germany.

This desire to re-invigorate and set East German Socialism right served as an important precedent which, essentially, was followed up by Havemann, Biermann, Heym, Wolf and Bahro all of whom had been members of the SED as well. This aspiration was similarly reflected in the intellectual critics strong affinity with the Prague Spring experiment in Czechoslovakia and the subsequent enthusiasm which many of these same people felt for Eurocommunism.

Expressions of Christian dissent hardly engendered a central liberal alternative either. To the contrary, the criticism of the SED's policies which emanated from the Churches and their respective communities has since the early 1960's been marked by a radical pacifist dynamic and, more recently, by an ecological awareness characteristic of the Green movement. The Church also unintentionally proved to be the midwife of the autonomous peace and ecology movements which have challenged the nature and direction of East German society in a fundamental way quite at variance with what could be expected from a liberal movement. Furthermore, the critics in these movements remain highly skeptical of the West and a definite continuum exists between their activities and the concerns of persons like Havemann, Heym and Bahro. In addition, the most prominent dissident within the East German Protestant community is Rainer Epplemann who wrote the Berlin Appeal together with the Marxist Havemann and who now closely associates himself

with Wolfgang Templin, another Marxist whose ideas resemble those which were espoused by Havemann.

In more general terms, the Church, in having facilitated the birth of these autonomous movements has been indirectly responsible for the emergence of the new opposition rooted in them. Furthermore, this is an opposition which is also openly skeptical of the West as well as the East, has fundamentally questioned the nature and direction of East German society and holds a view of what East German Socialism should be that recalls some of Bahro's ideas at the time of his arrest in 1978. In having played this role the Church effectively spawned a manifestation of political opposition which is at least as significant as the brief oppositional challenge by the workers in June 1953 and which appears likely to acquire much greater long term importance.

Even the human rights activism embodied in the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights' does not form the basis of a central liberal alternative to the present political order in the DDR. This is the case because it is principally a response to the repressive onslaught the State unleashed against the autonomous peace movement while at the same time its spokespersons have expressed no desire to embrace the West.

If it is true that there has not, in any meaningful sense, been a visible liberal alternative present with East German society it has, until very recently, also been true

that dissent and critical thought in the DDR is very unique. One can appreciate this by contrasting the development of dissent in the DDR to the development of dissent in other East bloc states.

East German dissent and critical thought bears virtually no resemblance to either Bulgarian or Romanian dissent. In these two East bloc states dissent has been principally confined to short outbursts of working class discontent and relatively minor incidents of nationalist dissent involving ethnic Hungarians and Germans in the case of Romania, and subtle nationalist dissent by the Turkish minority in the case of Bulgaria. The human rights activism of Paul Goma in Romania constitutes the only basis of any similarity. This is so simply insofar as Goma openly identified with Charter 77 as has the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights.'

In contrast to Romania, open working class dissent was evident in a spectacular way in June 1953 but has been nearly non-existent since. In contrast to both Romania and Bulgaria dissent involving national minorities virtually does not fit into the picture in East Germany. The DDR has no numerically large national minorities.

The situation in the DDR is also different from that of Hungary. This is mainly due to the differences between the regimes which followed their respective working class uprisings of the 1950's. Another factor is the differing roles played by the Churches. Unlike the DDR's Protestant Church,

the Hungarian Catholic Church has been very accommodating to the political status quo and was not nearly as instrumental in fostering autonomous peace activism in Hungary. It has also had no substantial relationship to autonomous ecological activism. Autonomous peace activism in Hungary has also proved to be less durable than in the DDR.

Nonetheless, important similarities exist. Both the DDR and Hungary experienced a massive expression of working class unrest in the mid-1950's followed by an almost complete absence of open protest by workers since. During the 1960's anti-Stalinist currents of Marxist thought exercised a strong influence on the critical intelligentsia of both states although leading Hungarian intellectual critics like Miklos Haraszti subsequently turned away from Marxism while their East German counterparts did not. Most importantly, the oppositions in the DDR and Hungary have both arrived at a point where they combine an interest in peace issues with human rights activity and are deeply involved in the process of East-West dialogue involving independent movements in the East bloc and the Western peace movement.

Likewise, manifestations of dissent and critical thought in Czechoslovakia and the DDR have very much in common as the Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights' indicates. But there were few similarities in the past. In fact, only two really stand out. One involves the way in which dissent had been frustrated by the persistence of Stalinist and neo-Stalinist rule in both states. The other, related phenome-

non involves the two societies having both endured Soviet military intervention to terminate the numerically largest movement for change which has appeared to date in each country.

The differences between East German and Czechoslovak dissent have been cumulatively more profound. Thus, the Soviets resorted to military action to quell a workers' insurrection marked by mass strikes and street violence in the DDR. But in Czechoslovakia they moved against a strictly non-violent, reform movement led by the ruling Communist Party. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia has not experienced anything like the June 1953 events in the DDR while the East Germans have never lived through an experience like the Prague Spring. In the DDR, the one real reform movement in the SED was thoroughly routed in its infancy and those who subsequently drew inspiration from the Prague Spring were in no way in a position to mount a significant challenge to the SED's political course although Bahro seemed to believe otherwise.

The strength of Marxist ideology and radical left politics within East German dissent and critical thought also stands in sharp contrast with what has transpired in Czechoslovakia. Marxist dissenters make up a notable but distinct minority within Charter 77. But otherwise they have not been a political factor except during the existence of the student circles at the time of the Prague Spring and for a short period afterwards. The most radical manifes-

tations of protest to date centred around the short-lived workers' councils movement of late 1968 and the Western influenced counter-cultural and punk scenes which remain active today. However, the latter two phenomena have not engendered an ongoing, politically-focused movement although official attacks on the progressive rock band 'Plastic People of the Universe' did encourage the start of Charter 77. By contrast, in the DDR, such manifestations of youthful protest have been closely wed to the autonomous peace movement. One observer summed the relationship up as follows.

Independent peace initiatives form the political cutting edge of a combative youth culture involving many thousands of East German youth in all important cities. Not a movement in the Western sense - such organized movements are in any event impossible under the bureaucratic regime - but clearly more than just a mood, a diverse blend embracing left-socialists, pacifists, counter-culturalists, punks and ecologists whose common denominator is thorough-going opposition to the militarization of East German society.<sup>2</sup>

The absence of an autonomous peace movement in Czechoslovakia marks another very important contrast. Quite unlike in the DDR, autonomous peace actions have been spontaneous, few in number and isolated. In fact, Charter 77 has consistently been the principal source of independent commentary on peace and peace-related issues. As was the case in relation to Hungary, much of the difference with the DDR stems from the differing roles played by the main church in each state. The Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia is not officially accepted like the Protestant Church is in the

DDR. It was probably incapable, under Husak at least, of playing a midwife role in relation to political activism and almost certainly would not have dared to try. This meant that anyone in Czechoslovakia who desired to engage in independent political activity did not have the limited degree of protective cover available in the DDR and could only turn to Charter 77 and its Western sympathizers for protection or support.

The role of the East German Protestant Church in fostering much of the proliferation of dissent and critical thought since the conflict over the imposition of conscription in 1962 constitutes the most important, but not the only, similarity with the situation which has prevailed in Poland. Simply stated, the movements which have shaken East German and Polish society in the 1980's came into being in large measure because of the institutional autonomy of their respective, leading Churches and have survived to the extent which they have because of the 'space' available on church property. This means that the Catholic Church in Poland and the Protestant Church in the DDR have both been midwives to the most important, sustained expressions of dissent and critical thought in their respective societies. Furthermore, the movements whose rise they facilitated both experienced the political dilemma highlighted by the protests and severe repression of autonomous peace activists in Jena and Weimar who took their protest actions to the streets. There has also been at least some degree of



tension between these movements and the Church in their respective societies as they developed and inevitably tested the limits of official tolerance and began to fundamentally call into question the political status quo.

Elsewhere, a certain similarity can be noted with respect to intellectual dissent. This was especially true during the 1950's and through to the early 1970's. In the mid-1950's both Polish and East German intellectual dissent was strongly marked by reformist aspirations. Both had essentially the same political direction and neither rejected Marxism, only the product of its alleged perversion under Stalinist rule.

In the sixties too, Polish student and intellectual dissent was not marked by a rejection of Marxism. Kuron and Modzelewski's 'Open Letter to the Party' exemplified this fact although their document did comprise a more thorough attack on the Soviet system than could be found in the tracts of East German Marxist dissidents during the 1960's. Furthermore, the Warsaw student protests of March 1968 may have expressed anti-Soviet feelings but they were not anti-Socialist in character insofar as there appears to have been strong sympathy with the Czechoslovak experiment going on at the time. Thus, it was not until the 1970's that Polish dissident intellectuals shifted increasingly away from Marxist ideology and intellectual dissidence became very distinct from its counterpart in the DDR.

Other very important similarities exist today. These

have developed in part because of the grave ecological crisis in Poland which has made ecological activism a very important part of the dissident scene as in the DDR. In particular, this situation has made environmental issues a major programmatic concern of both Solidarnosc and the new Freedom and Peace (WiP) movement. Solidarnosc's concern is illustrated in its programmatic document 'Poland in 1985' which articulates the banned union's "assessment of the overall situation in Poland and proffers some prospects for the future."<sup>3</sup>

The birth of independent peace activism in Poland in the mid-1980's which weds peace issues to ecology and human rights issues is another, crucial example of how Polish dissent now bears important similarities to East German dissent. Furthermore, the Freedom and Peace movement, which is the principal expression of this activism, also emerged from within the country's main Church. It also arose with a focus on compulsory military service and social militarization and now, like the East German peace movement, is forging links with the Western peace movement, and particularly with END and certain activists from the Green movement in West Germany. In addition, WiP has been influenced by the Western peace movement and, in the aftermath of Chernobyl, has become the medium for public protest against nuclear power. Given that WiP is currently "the most active group in the opposition" and that it is "the only group working on the street" this shows yet

another very significant similarity between Polish and East German dissent today.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, there are obvious and very important differences between East German and Polish dissent and critical thought. East Germany has not experienced, nor could it experience by itself anything like the Polish events of 1980-81 or the huge underground movement which followed the declaration of Martial Law. These differences are due to the distinct historical development of German and Polish societies and their unique relations with the Soviet Union in this century.

Another clear difference lies in the roles played by workers in each of the two countries. Whereas the East German workers powerfully asserted themselves just the one time the Polish workers have repeatedly acted as the motor force for social and political change in Poland. Their relative acquiescence during the 1968 student unrest constituted about the only occasion where the workers did not play a major role in an important manifestation of dissent prior to the 1980's.

Overall, in some respects, East German dissent is very unique to the entire Soviet bloc. For example, it is the one East bloc state where feminism is a very significant aspect of the movement of political opposition. Feminist activity, which is either implicit or explicit, has been documented in the USSR, Poland and, to a slight degree, in Czechoslovakia. But in none of these states has it assumed

the kind of prominence evident in the DDR.

Ecological consciousness has also been a higher priority in the DDR although Poland now ranks a close second and the devastation of the ecology is currently a major concern of Czechoslovak dissent as well. Conversely, explicit human rights activism has been far less of a factor in the DDR than elsewhere and this situation has only started to change in the last two years. In turn, all of these unique characteristics of East German dissent and critical thought are either products of its far left political orientation or the influence of Western oppositional forces like the Greens or a combination of the two.

While it is true that certain West German Greens have reached out to and had varying degrees of influence on the oppositional movements in most East bloc states, their impact has been the greatest in the DDR. This fact is indicative of the way in which East German dissent and critical thought has been directly affected by West German developments and particularly issues relative to the German Question. This is true to a degree which has only been surpassed by developments originating in the USSR, insofar as factors external to the DDR are concerned.

The Soviet Union's dominance of the DDR was the most decisive factor in the development of East German dissent and critical thought during the 1950's. This phenomenon was exemplified by the affects of the USSR's military interventions in the DDR in 1953 and Hungary in 1956 and by the

Soviets repeated decisions to keep Ulbricht in power thereby maintaining a neo-Stalinist system of rule. These Soviet policy decisions doomed open manifestations of dissent to the margins of East German political life at least up until the storm of protest generated against the 1976 expulsion of Wolf Biermann. Furthermore, in the interim, the Soviets termination of the Prague Spring experiment had a similar effect in mitigating against major manifestations of dissent and critical thought. This action reinforced a neo-Stalinist policy direction in the DDR as the invasion of Hungary had done before.

On the other hand, Moscow's authorization of the Berlin Wall as a device to shore up the DDR and facilitate Western recognition of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe had a somewhat different effect. It shattered whatever hopes East Germans harboured in 1961 for a substantive return to a Western version of political pluralism and seriously dampened aspirations for German re-unification. Achieving the latter had been a dominant objective of East German dissent up to August 13, 1961. Consequently, the USSR was instrumental in sustaining the absence of a liberal alternative as part of the dissident scene throughout the 1960's and in precluding anything other than a gradualist, reform-oriented strategy for political change until the appearance of Rudolph Bahro's critique of 'Actually Existing Socialism' in the mid-1970's which advocated a more radical course.

Stated differently, the USSR compelled those East

Germans openly aspiring for social and political change to become increasingly DDR-centred in their objectives. The Soviet Union did this by authorizing the action which was decisive to the rapid consolidation of a much more viable, increasingly distinct and SED-led society in what had been the Soviet Zone of Germany. As a result, with the exception of Bahro, only DDR-centred strategies were put forward until peace issues came to dominate the dissident agenda owing to the concerns of East Germany's religious community. Significantly, the latter development also occurred under the impact of growing peace activism across Europe and especially in West Germany.

Such West German influences by their very nature sustain the relevance of the German Question to East German dissent and critical thought. They have also been a political constant in the DDR. Yet their visible impact on the content of dissent and critical thought has been far from consistent. Thus, these phenomena were highly significant factors up to and during the June 1953 workers' insurrection and have risen to prominence under the impact of autonomous peace activism. But during the 1960's and most of the 1970's they were far from decisive in their influence on dissent.

To be specific, during the 1953 workers' insurrection the weight of West Germany's influence on the DDR was exemplified by the clear expression of continued, strong East German worker support for the West German SPD. This

also reflected the fact that the permanent division of Germany seemed almost inconceivable in 1953. It further showed that the East German workers still saw themselves as Germans and retained an attachment to the traditional political focus of German worker aspirations.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the workers in June 1953 there were two notable, open manifestations of West Germany's influence on discontented East Germans. The most significant of these was the mass exodus of East Germans to the Federal Republic. The other was the desire for German re-unification embodied in Harich's reform programme. However, in the sense that the mass exodus of East Germans was the most pronounced manifestation of the impact of West Germany on the DDR's citizens, it must be stated that West German influences were much more of a hindrance to oppositional activity than a catalyst for it, until long after August 13, 1961.

Following the erection of the Berlin Wall Havemann stood virtually alone in openly embracing an all-German perspective. While the other critical intellectuals tended to share his view that the DDR was the better German state they did not share this strong preoccupation with the German Question; a preoccupation Havemann maintained until his death in 1982. The German Question simply did not figure prominently in the concerns they openly expressed about East German society.

Bahro exemplified this lack of orientation to an all-

German perspective. His primary concern was to see the realization of an East German social order which would be qualitatively different from and superior to the one prevalent in the Federal Republic. Furthermore, Bahro adopted this goal with an eye toward advancing the cause of Marxist Socialism globally. Yet even he, and others like Heym and Kunze, found himself turning to West German television and or to West German publishers in order to disseminate his views to a mass audience in the DDR. In effect, even dissent by the likes of Bahro and Heym was not manifested separately from West Germany's influence on the DDR. This, in turn, further demonstrated how the German Question has affected all manifestations of East German dissent and critical thought to at least some degree.

The subsequent appearance of the Havemann Initiative and the Berlin Appeal had the effect of returning the German Question to the centre-stage of dissident activity in a programmatic sense. More recent, and more explicitly oppositional documents such as the East German reply to the Prague Appeal and a statement marking the 25th anniversary of the Berlin Wall have sustained this prominence. Critically, these oppositional statements, coupled with new phenomena like the affinity which has developed between certain West German Greens and the new East German opposition, have also had the effect of demonstrating the way dissent and critical thought in the DDR, has in a very real sense, come full circle.



Nonetheless, in the process of having come full circle East German dissent and critical thought has acquired a very different political content which closely approximates that of radical and alternative politics in the other Germany. Consequently, the new oppositional force present in the DDR and the political milieu which embodies it can now be depicted as a movement of social resistance in its embryo which, to a large degree mirrors what can be termed West Germany's dissident movement. Thus, dissent in the DDR, as in the Federal Republic, has undergone a transformation. What had been to a large extent, a manifestation of discontent by workers who identified with political parties or ideas born of the German Marxist tradition is now firmly rooted in the "new movements" which emerged in the West during the 1960's and early 1970's. Specifically, these include the ecological, feminist and anti-nuclear movements.\*

There are, nonetheless, major differences between East and West German dissent. But these differences are largely tactical in nature and attributable to the major differences between the two German states. This is especially apparent with respect to the different degrees to which civil liberties are in force and why, and, perhaps even more so, concerning the differing capacities of the two states to adapt to domestic pressures for social and political change.

By way of conclusion one must note the irony of the situation in the DDR today. This irony lies in the fact that active concern about issues related to peace were

instrumental to the birth of this new political opposition which has openly taken up the German Question and placed issues inseparable from it at the forefront of an agenda for political change and, in doing so, has implicitly questioned the very legitimacy of the East German "peace state." Furthermore, this political opposition rooted in the autonomous peace movement appears destined to comprise a very significant, ongoing force in East German society and constitutes the potential focal point for any serious challenge by the embryonic movement of social resistance. And finally, the likely endurance of this new opposition means that almost 40 years after the German Democratic Republic was established as a separate German state pursuing a clearly distinct path of social and political development, its neo-Stalinist leaders seem destined to continue to be openly haunted by the threatening specter of the German Question.

\*This is entirely appropriate given that the DDR is a leading hazardous waste dump for other European states. In 1983, the Federal Republic sent about 20,000 shipments of hazardous waste to the DDR, while in 1984 the Netherlands sent 4000.<sup>5</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Nico Huebner, "A Young Man in Opposition", Encounter July 1978, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Editor, "Renewed Crackdown on East German Peace Movement", Across Frontiers, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>NSZZ Solidarnosc, Poland in 1985 (Co-ordinating Office of NSZZ Solidarnosc, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>END's Polish Working Group, "Conversations in Poland", END Journal No. 26, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>World Commission on the Environment and Development, Report of the World Commission on the Environment and Development (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 227.

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#### POSTSCRIPT

During the summer of 1987 the author visited East Berlin and met with two prominent activists associated with The Initiative 'Peace and Human Rights.' While there the author first saw three issues of 'Grenzfall' which is one of two new unofficial publications produced by activists in East Berlin. Grenzfall has been appearing since late 1986 in quantities of 500 to 800 copies per issue. The most recent issues have been 22 single-spaced typed pages in length.

Grenzfall and the other independent journal 'Umweltblaetter' are the first known, regular samizdat publications to have ever appeared in the DDR and, according to the author's sources, they have been warmly received within the independent peace movement. Photocopied issues of Grenzfall can be obtained from the author at the following address:

Bruce Allen  
P. O. Box 284  
Main Station  
St. Catharines, Ontario  
L2R 6T7  
Canada